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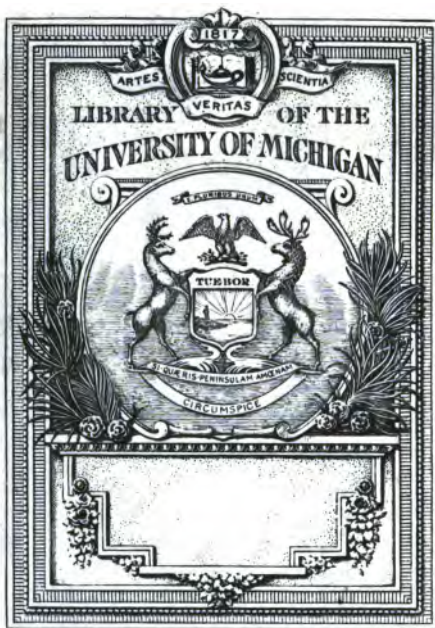
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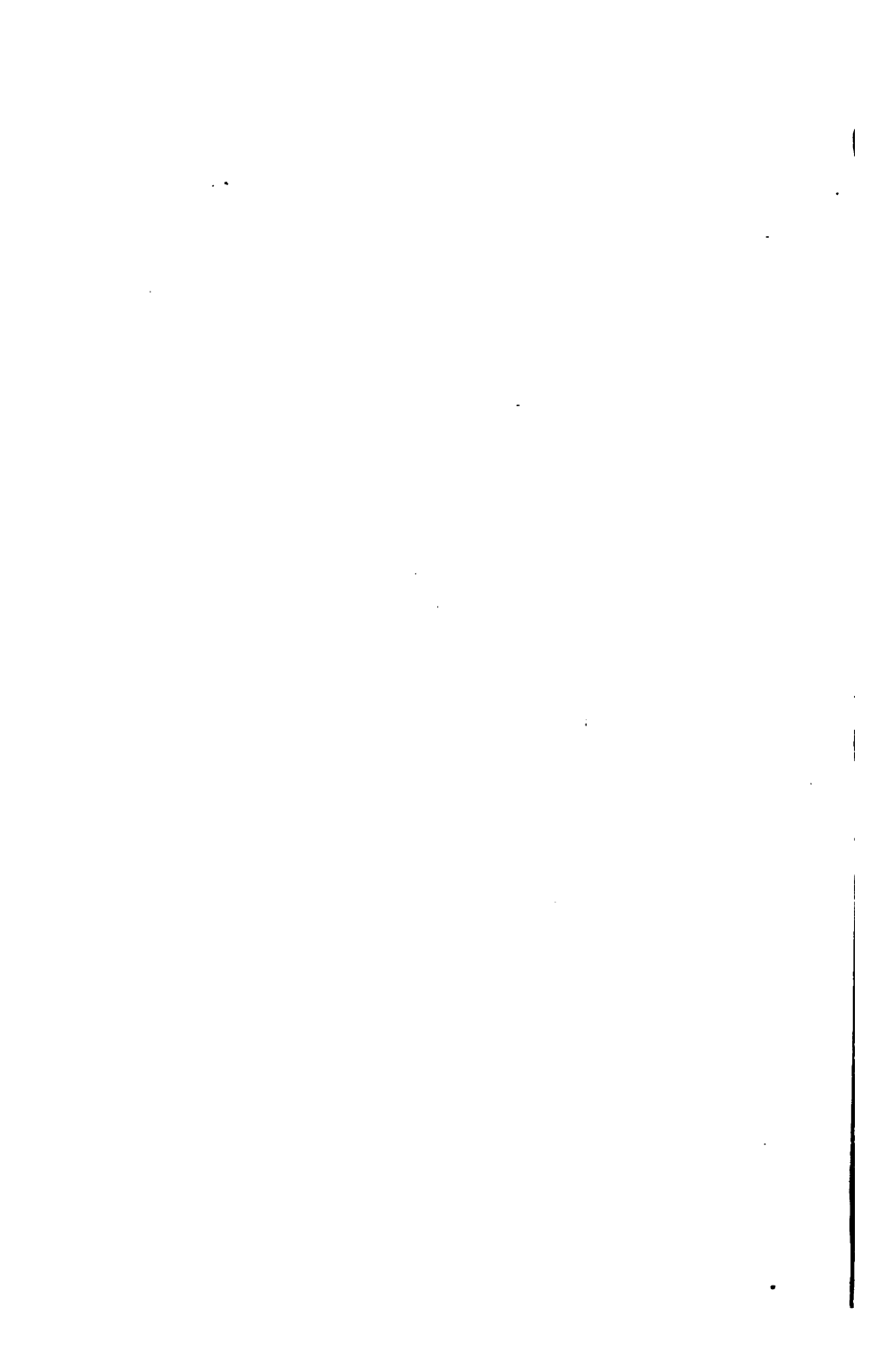
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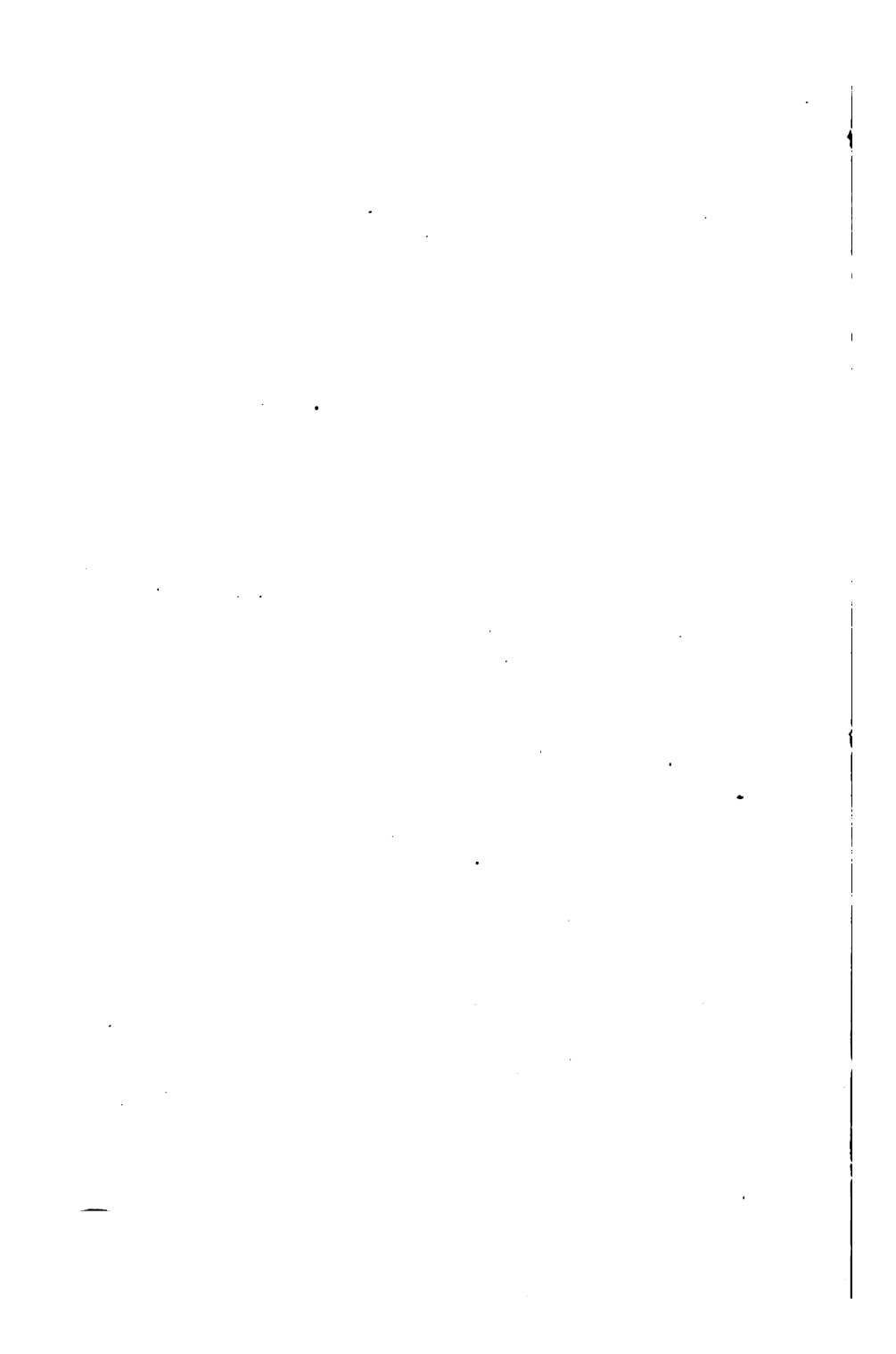
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A HUMAN DOCUMENT

VOL. II.



A HUMAN DOCUMENT

A Nobel

William ^{BY} ~~Hand~~ MALLOCK

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.



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CHAPTER XII.

THE white houses and the emerald leafage of Lichtenbourg had the glow on them of a warm, peach-coloured sunset. During the last few days the rapid spring had been busy, multiplying flower and bud. It had also called into existence a number of new visitors. It was not a number that by any means amounted to a crowd, but it still was sufficient to give an air of life to the place; and the walks and seats in the square on which the restaurant opened were gay with a sprinkling of company, looking forward to dinner. The eye was at once caught by

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various feminine dresses, most of them rather startling, a few exceedingly pretty; and by some officers in uniform, ready to scrutinize and admire them: whilst the prettiest dress of all, surmounted by the prettiest hat, illuminated the seat which was most open to observation, and shared it with an officer whose good fortune was widely envied. The officer himself evidently considered it enviable, and was making the most of his voice and his handsome eyes; whilst the eyes of his companion, and the delicate colour in her cheeks, seemed to show that she was excited, even if not pleased, with her situation. He was talking to her now in French, now in German; and he was just in the middle of a quotation from a French song, which his manner showed that he considered extremely telling.

“ Qui veut ouïr, qui veut savoir
Comment les diplomats aiment.”

“ Ils aiment,” he was continuing, with an insinuating smile, “ ils aiment si diplomatiquement,” when he saw to his mortification the lady’s eyes wander, and her expression

completely change. She rose suddenly from her seat, and moved forward to meet a man who, he was conscious, had stopped just in front of them. This man's expression too, as well as that of the lady, was troubled and discomposed. Pleasure, surprise, and a something that was not pleasure, succeeded each other on his face, and remained there mixed together. As the two greeted each other, a very acute observer might have seen that their cordiality, or at least its extreme openness, was due to nervousness quite as much as to feeling. The officer, however, was far from being acute; and having borne neglect heroically for the better part of a minute, he rose, lit a cigar, and catching the eye of the lady, whilst pique shone in his own, he forced a smile, made a bow, and departed. Had he waited a moment longer he would not perhaps have fled so precipitately; for the manner of the lady and her friend, as soon as the greeting was over, grew rapidly more constrained, and almost suggested coldness.

"Do you know, Mr. Grenville, I was never

so surprised in my life," the lady was saying. "I thought you must have been your ghost."

"Well," he answered, "and I really believe I might have been, for since I last saw you, I have been through a kind of death. My dear Mrs. Schilizzi, you needn't look so concerned. If I told you what I meant, you would say—Is it only that?"

"Well," she laughed, "at all events that's a comfort; but what you said had a most tragic sound in it. I thought you were in England."

"I have managed," he replied, "to settle my business without going there; and I have done now what, if possible, I always meant to do—come back here to see the castle whose photograph we were looking at, at luncheon. It seems a year ago to me, that does; so much has happened since then."

"To me, too, it seems ages."

"Is that," he said, "because so much has happened to you also?"

"It is rather," she replied, "because nothing has."

She had not resumed her seat. They were walking together slowly. They were silent for a few moments; and then with a constrained indifference, "You have, at any rate, found," he said, "a very attentive acquaintance."

She looked up at him with a half mischievous smile. "What," she asked, "do you mean that Austrian captain? I met him at Vienna at a public ball last year. Perhaps he is, now that you come to mention it, one of the things that has made my time pass slowly. He's handsome, and could be pleasant if he'd never open his mouth. As it is, he's been boring my very life out; and the only pleasure he's given me is the thought that he goes to-morrow."

At this news Grenville's expression softened. He asked her where she dined. She told him in her own rooms, adding that she had letters to write, and would not reappear that evening.

"Then perhaps," said Grenville, "I shall see you to-morrow morning. Will you let

me tell you my adventures? And if we find it can be managed, perhaps you will make another expedition with me?"

"I can never," she said, "see you in the morning. Quite early, I teach my children, and after that I am busy with something of my own. In spite of the charms of your friend, the Austrian officer, I have been obliged to make an occupation for many hours of solitude."

"And what occupation is that?" he asked.

"I wonder," she said, half flippantly, "if I can tell you; you'll only laugh if I do. What do you think it is? I have begun writing a diary."

"I too not long since began doing the same thing. I dare say we're not singular. My diary, I find, has one merit at all events: my last few days in Italy have turned it into a book of surprises."

"Italy!" she exclaimed. "And have you been in Italy? I should like to hear about that. One of these days you will perhaps tell me—that is to say if you are not leaving

directly. Good-bye, it is late—I must be going in to my children.”

As she said this they were just at the entrance of the hotel ; and, without giving him time to detain her by some question which she saw was on his lips, she ran up the steps, throwing a parting smile at him, and was lost to sight in the shadow within the doorway.

Grenville was not much pleased by this abrupt ending of the interview ; and after dinner he loitered in the neighbourhood of the band, hoping that after all he should find a chance of renewing it. But he looked in vain for her. She had been quite sincere in saying that the whole of that evening she meant to give to her letters ; and she was, indeed, in her sitting-room with envelopes and paper before her. These, however, she presently pushed aside. “I can’t,” she murmured, and drawing towards her some sheets of foolscap, she began, not to write, but to read something already written on them. This was the beginning of her diary.

What she read was as follows—

“Different people write diaries for different reasons and objects; some because they do so much else, others because they have so little else to do; some to record what they have seen, others to record only what they have *been*. As for me, the last case is mine. I have done nothing and seen nothing. What I have *been* is my only history. And why am I going to write it—or try to write it? Not because I am idle, but because I am lonely, and I must speak to something—I must be myself somehow. I write for the same sort of reason that makes a boy sing, or a woman at times sob. Just as a sob relieves the heart, so will this writing relieve something else in me—something—I don’t know what.

“But before I do so, I want to assure myself of one thing—that I am not like a silly sentimental school-girl, sighing and crying over her own fancies. I have known some girls—girls who have kept diaries, and who have used them like looking-glasses in which

they made interesting faces at themselves. I am not like that, I wish to see myself as I am and have been ; and I shall try to record this, and I believe I shall be able to do so. I don't know life, but I do at least know my own life, uneventful as it must seem to every human being that has known me. Its events have been all within. I know the difference between fact and fancy ; but I do not know the difference between fact and feeling. There are facts which are not feelings, but all feelings are facts, and the only facts which give the others any meaning. What would action be if it affected nobody's feelings ? It might as well be something taking place in Jupiter. What would thought be if we felt nothing ? Thought at its highest is but the genius, the slave of the lamp, who either guides feeling or works for it.

“Yes, but granting all this, here comes another question which will trouble me till I have made my answer to it. My life may consist of facts, even though it only consists of feelings. True—but are they facts worth

having their history written? Will my sense of the ridiculous allow me to think they are? It will, and for this reason. Every human being may not be a good model to draw, but every human body would be a good subject to dissect—how much more every human soul! Who am I? What am I? I am nobody, and less than nothing. I am not even one of my own few possibilities. I know it. And yet if human existence has any meaning at all, my life must have some meaning also. None of us is worth anything, if any one of us is not worth something.

“How philosophical I am! But I am going to be philosophical no longer. I sink, with a sudden fall, to the style of a foolish woman.

“I call this a diary. It will at first be a memoir, for I can only get at myself by going first back to my childhood. The chief characteristic of my life I can trace in it even then—that I was alone. My own mind was my only real playground. I do not mean that I was an only child, or that in any marked way

I isolated myself from my brothers and sisters. On the contrary, I laughed and romped and lay in the hay, and climbed trees, with them. But as I dangled my legs from the boughs—I remember it still so clearly—what filled my consciousness was the world of leafy branches and the green lights which seemed, in some strange way, to hint to me of another life. When I lay amongst the hay and looked up at the sky, the clouds were enchanted mountains, and I wandered amongst their dissolving passes.

“How often have I heard people say that self-analysis is morbid. But what I am writing now is not self-analysis; I only wish it were; I wish that myself then were myself now. Oh, little girl who art lost, who never can live again, I can think about you and describe you as if you were some one else! The sole link between us is the nerve called memory—that is so often aching—and the pronoun ‘I.’

“And yet, perhaps, I am wrong. As I write on, I shall see.

“My father and mother were both people of

family, though they never mixed in what is commonly called the world ; but in both their characters was a certain pride, which though we were not important enough for it to develop in us exclusiveness, did develop something which is nearly the same—seclusiveness. All my childhood was spent in an enclosed garden.

“ And what sort of childhood was it ? I have said something about it already, but not all I want to say. In going on I feel a kind of diffidence. It is easy enough to say that my life was a life of loneliness, but it is not so easy to say—at least I shrink in doing so—that the heart of that loneliness was religion. But so it was. Nobody would have thought so, and clergymen would not admit that I am using the word rightly. For I do not mean that I was always going to church, or always or indeed often saying my prayers ; but I was full of the longing that moves people to pray, and to do and feel many other things besides. It was a longing for something beyond and above

me, and at the same time about me, but always eluding me. I saw it in the sky and in the woods, and I heard it in church when the organ sounded. As for what people commonly call religion, I had to pick up my knowledge of that pretty much for myself, for mother was born a Catholic, though she went to the English church; and my father, though a very good man, had, I believe, only one religious belief, and this was that the Church of Rome was wrong. Still I was confirmed; and when I went to my first communion, I felt—I can't express it now; but it was something the same feeling I had when first I saw the sea; or when the sky, or a flower, or anything, struck me suddenly with its depth of beauty. I remember so well how on such occasions as these I used sometimes to whisper to myself 'How beautiful!' and sometimes 'God, be good to me!' It was a chance which of the two I whispered; I meant the same by both.

"I remember also another thing, which makes me laugh as I think of it. I used

often—as most girls do—to stand looking at myself in the glass; and the beauty of my own reflection, such as it was, moved me and troubled me, much as other beauty did. I never thought—never, so far as I can remember, ‘There’s beautiful me.’ I only thought, ‘There’s a beautiful something.’ I seemed to myself, as I looked at my cheeks, to be merely like a flower given into my own keeping, and I wondered about the meaning of the petals, and was half frightened at their delicacy.

“Idiot that I am to write these trifles down! And yet am I? They are facts—hard, unvarnished facts of a life that at all events was quite free from affectations. And why should the movements of a young girl’s thoughts not be as well worth recording as the movements of sap in a vegetable?

“Anyhow I have put enough of them down now. I go on to what is broader. All these feelings of mine, for the sky, the sea, for church music, or my own complexion, were only manifestations of a constant something

within me, panting to fulfil itself, and not knowing how.

“ But, though it did not know, it was always trying to find out; and these attempts form really the whole history of my girlhood. Poetry, drawing, music, and then knowledge—hard, dry knowledge—I tried them all. I am not talking of what I did in the school-room—that counts for nothing. I am talking only of what I did by myself, and with my whole heart prompting me. And indeed everything that came home to me I had to pick up in this way, much as I did my instruction about religion, without any help or guidance. What volumes of poetry at one time I knew by heart! I found them all out for myself, and took to them only because I hoped to find in them some answer to the question, ‘What is it that I long for?’ But they did not quiet me, they only made me more restless; and I felt an impulse to do—to fulfil myself by action. I tried to draw and paint, and till I saw I could do neither, for a good six months I was almost beside myself

with hope. Then I think came music. Could I only have done what I attempted, the music of the spheres would have been nothing to what I should have extracted from a cottage piano. But the keys at last became like a row of tombstones, forming a cemetery in which my attempts were buried. After that I began to read books of science and philosophy, full of hard words the meaning of which I had to guess at ; and it seemed to me for a considerable time that what I longed for was to be found in the satisfaction of the intellect. What ideas I had ! How my mind rode away on them as if they were wings ! I used to work them out in things that I called essays, trembling with pride as I wielded the long words of Mr. Herbert Spencer. And then, generally by the time I had read a little more, I found all the profundities I had arrived at were mere truisms or commonplaces, or that else they were nonsense. But I was not discouraged—at least not for a long time. Perhaps—perhaps—I am not wholly discouraged now. If I am, I am done for.

“And all this while, what became of my religion—I mean my religion of prayers and church-going? I can’t quite tell. The whole history of it is so vague. The fact is, about such matters I was not very clear, to begin with; and with me, feeling, and faith, and longing, and self-prostration were so much more than any defined beliefs, that I hardly noticed how these last were gradually sapped by the books which I read so eagerly, and how so much of what the clergyman said came gradually to seem so foolish. But I think it was only the words that I heard in church that lost their power over me. I put these aside as one might put aside the libretto of an opera which had some connection with the music, but only an insufficient one; whilst the meaning of the music itself still remained the same for me, and shook my heart as the organ shook the windows. How often contrition—I can’t tell for what—came trembling into me, and the spirit of prayer bowed me, as the wind bends corn! But what came oftenest was mere

adoration—mere longing—again I can't tell for what; but all was for the same thing that I felt in nature, that I tried to capture in drawing, and to express in music, and to find in thought and study. Some people, who lose any of the definite beliefs which they learnt as children, experience much misery at the loss. I don't think I did; and the reason was what I have just stated—that the definite part of religion was to me the least important part. Indeed I remember saying to myself one day in church, when the clergyman was preaching about Joshua's moon in Ajalon, 'Perhaps I have not got a religion, but I myself am religion.' I meant, 'I am a-longing for whatever will most completely fulfil myself,' and my only articulate prayer was little more than this—'Reveal to me what I long for, and unite me completely with it.'

"If any one besides myself were to read these confessions, I know one thing which he or she would say—'This silly girl in search of an object for her sentiment, did it never occur

to her to fancy herself in love? Did she never try to solve her perplexities that way?' Yes and no—but much more no than yes. Love did enter into my thoughts; but let me explain how. I felt myself capable of it; but I felt this in some far-off way. As for associating the idea of it with any one I ever met, that seemed to me sacrilege. I felt it to be something which was so sacred, and which, if it came, would be so overwhelming, that it frightened me. It made me afraid of myself, as if I held within me some mystery. One or two men—indeed more than one or two, whilst I was still quite young—fell in love with me. Instead of being flattered or touched by this, I felt it as a kind of impertinence, and I was glad when I saw how very easily I could repulse them. They, I believe, thought I was heartless. I was not. It was because I revered my heart so much, and felt in such awe of the Unknown contained in it, that I was indignant at them for presuming to think about it. Could I only love—this is the thought that would come to me—what would

the feeling be? I should die of it. Where would it carry me? I was afraid to go on thinking. I only knew this, that I never had seen any one, and could not imagine any one, who would justify the feeling in me, and make it not seem wicked. I remember still how afraid I grew of myself. I hardly dared even, at one time, to read Keats' poetry, it moved me so, without any justifying cause.

"The only emotion, the only love, that I could indulge in frankly, and that supported and did not frighten me, was love of my parents. They didn't understand me — I always felt that; but I felt that they desired my welfare; and though they could not share my thoughts, it seemed to me that they sheltered them. What was my pain then when one day, quite by accident, I heard mother saying this to father—'Irma is so pretty that she ought to marry well.' And then, before I could get out of hearing, I caught the name of a neighbouring country squire. I had no dislike to the man — I thought nothing about him; but to hear him

mentioned in this way, was like hearing a knife talked about that was to be drawn across my throat. After that, for three weeks I was miserable. Father and mother couldn't tell what had come to me; and when a letter arrived from my aunt, asking me to stay with her in Hungary, they thought the change would be good for me, and gladly let me go. I too was half glad; but I had a little garden where I used to work by myself; and I was sorry to leave that, and my poor little book-shelf full of well-worn books, some of which were children's fairy-stories. It was arranged that a friend of my aunt's who was going there at the same time should look after me on the journey. I knew nothing of him, till I saw him, except his name and the fact that he was very rich; and after I had seen him, I knew nothing more for weeks, except that he had almond-shaped dark eyes, a straight nose, and a smile; that he talked rather fast, and that he talked a great deal to me. My aunt told me that if he had wished it the Emperor would have made him a baron. A few

days later she told me he wished to marry me.

“How I consented I really can hardly tell. Secret correspondence went on between my aunt and my parents; and mother wrote to me and told me how happy my prospects were, and how little money I should ever have of my own; and how sad and anxious she had once been for my future. One reason, I think, why I at length yielded, one reason why I did not shrink from this marriage as I might have done, was just the very fact that for me there was no love in it. Marriage came to me as something completely outside myself: it came to me simply as a new shell of circumstance, into which, with unavowed pressure, mother and all the others pushed me. How could I know what I was doing, or what was being done to me? I had no experience.

“Well, I have experience now. And yet, who would think it? No one who had watched me or lived with me, no matter how constantly or closely. Who could guess the history of my first married years? Certainly

not my husband ; and for one very sufficient reason, he never would care to try. My brother Robert told me how, when he first went to school, he used to cry to himself at nights, longing for home, thinking with a passionate affection of every worn patch in the carpets, and of the air full of peace and tenderness. For three years after my marriage I did just the same. I had plenty of servants and an extravagant cook ; but every time I looked at our smart dinner-table I thought of our school-room meals—our boiled mutton—our rice-pudding ; and I longed like a truant to run away and go back to them. What would mother have thought if she had seen me come back to her, and hiding, as I should have liked to hide, my face once more in her lap !

“ What could I have told her ? How could I have explained such a step ? I could not have explained it in any intelligible way to her. I could indeed have summed up my experience in a very few words. I could have said to her, Marriage is the suicide of hope ; but I could tell her no facts that would explain

so tragic a view. I could have told her that Paul's temper was not always, or often, of the best. In fact when I made mistakes in any little household matters, he was furious with me; and once, though I must say he was handsomely sorry for it afterwards, he struck me on the wrist with an ivory paper-knife, leaving a mark which for a fortnight I hid with a velvet band. I didn't mind that. Indeed I think the only time that I ever voluntarily kissed Paul was after he had struck me, just to show that I had forgiven him. No — what I minded was not what he was, but the sense which he inflicted on me daily of what he was not. He liked me in a way. In a way he took good care of me. But the way was this; he regarded me as a piece of china, which ornamented his drawing-room, and which had to be dusted carefully. The only difference between me and an *épergne* he was very fond of, was that it stood in the middle of the table, and I sat at the end of it. I was like a book which he valued for the rarity of its binding, but which he neither

could nor cared to read. How long I hoped against hope that this might not be true—that he was merely shy, merely slow in understanding me, and that we should at last really become companions! I tried to love him, and to make him love me; and could I only have met with any response from him, to some extent at least, I should have succeeded. I tried every means I could think of. In the afternoon I used to hurry home, in order to meet him when he returned from the railway he was then making. I did all I could to look glad and happy when I saw him. But the only result was this. Five minutes after I was in the drawing-room he was sure to go out of it; and if ever I ventured to follow him into his study, he invariably met me by asking me what I wanted. What did I want? It makes me laugh now to think of his asking that of me. It was something, Paul, you could never have understood, if I had told you. But at dinner, Paul, you couldn't rebuff me for being with you; and do you remember how I tried then to find my way

into your life? I tried at first to talk about the things that interested me or touched me—about the things that seemed to me to be beautiful, or happy, or sad, or perplexing. Good heavens! I might have been talking Hebrew to you. I put my thoughts into your hands—thoughts which I valued and cherished; and I hoped that you might be pleased with them. But what you did was to stare at them blankly, and then drop them, and let them break themselves into pieces. But still I would not be disheartened. I tried to approach you in another way. As you would not talk to me about my subjects, I tried to talk to you about yours. That annoyed you still more. It made you rude to me, not only cold. How different you were with men—with the men you brought to dine with you! They and you understood each other. You responded to what they said to you, as if you were a musical instrument touched by them—or rather a band of instruments—a band of instruments at a music-hall. For me, the attempt to talk to you was like

going out into a frosty day. How cold I was when I came back to myself again !

“During those three years, it seems to me that I was dead. If it had not been for my two children I should have died literally. I was very fond of them from the first ; but babies are not companions. Though they were near my heart, they could not tell how it was aching. Still they kept me alive. They prevented my heart from freezing. But when the eldest began to know me, and speak and understand a little, then I was conscious of some new accession of happiness ; and gradually, to my surprise, I felt in better spirits. I felt at last that I was something like myself again ; and to Paul’s extreme annoyance, I sang in the hall one morning. He swore at me, and I cried. No matter. What I was going to say was this. This revival of my spirits, through my growing love for my children, had a very odd effect on me. My vanity woke up again. I wanted company, I wanted a little amusement. Sometimes in the afternoon, when I was left all

alone, I went to look at myself in the glass, and wish that some one could see me. A woman would have satisfied me. I should often have liked a woman best ; but sometimes, I confess, I did wish for a man or two—just for the sake of seeing what effect I produced. My desire for admiration had all the temerity of innocence. That I could do anything wrong, or even wish for it, never seemed possible to me. Well—I made some acquaintances, not amongst Paul's connections. I made friends with some pretty and well-connected women ; and through them I came to know a certain number of men. My wishes soon fulfilled themselves. Every afternoon I had some admiring visitor.

“What things in life can be more different than some of our wishes before their fulfilment and after ! These men I speak of—all their attention and homage at first flattered and soothed me after Paul's neglect. Paul could never see too little of me. They could never see too much. At first this was charming. I really took an interest in some of them, and

thought they did in me. But, little by little, various things enlightened me. These men saw my beauty ; but I now divined how they saw it ; and they appeared to me hardly human. When their voices grew soft, how I hated them ! And yet, in spite of this I allowed them to go on calling on me ; and I began to take a sort of perverse pleasure in keeping them captive under false colours. I sheltered my real self—the self they could never understand—under an outer husk of the false self that they imagined ; and I thus enjoyed two different sorts of pride—one derived from their admiration of me, the other derived from my contempt for them.

“ This has not been good for me ; but it led to what was worse. The women with whom I now associated, and who were friends also of these men, almost before I was aware of it, made me one of their sisterhood. I thought they were angels first ; and then I learnt that they were not angels. How kind and pleasant they were to me, and what torture they

inflicted on me, when they first let me know them thoroughly! What they did, so far as I am concerned, was this. They did not induce me to follow their ways; but they made me familiar with their ideas. One of them lent me a number of French novels. They were novels by celebrated writers—classics; but oh, how wicked they seemed! How wicked the women were in them! I felt this, and yet I read. I read one book after another. But then, after a time, I felt I could stand it no longer. Some of the books I burnt; and others, I don't know where they are.

“If any one else—I again come back to that—if any one else were to read what I have just written, what dreadful things he or she would think of me! I should seem to be suggesting so much more than I have said. Wrong! wrong! What I have said has been the uttermost that I mean, so far as badness and folly go. And now I have this to add. These women, these men—their companionship and their flattery, even then, were not all my life, or indeed, I think, the most important part of

it. For just as my happiness in my children roused my vanity and my wish for excitement, because it raised my spirits, so did this excitement and this tribute to my vanity revive in me other things, not by raising my spirits but by troubling them. Those dreadful novels were not the only books I read; nor was admiration the only thing I thought of. I took again to my books of science and philosophy; I bought translations of all kinds of classical writers. My old longing to realize my own existence once more took possession of me; and all the false companionship which I now got, made my mind tumultuous with longing for some companionship that should be true. As to what this true companionship would be, I was as far off as ever from knowing. Would it take the form of knowledge, of beauty, or of a human friend? I know one thing—that not once, but several times, when the best of my admirers was coming to see me, and I had promised to be in by a certain hour in the afternoon, I forgot all about him in looking at a March sunset from a lonely

seat amongst some pine-trees, more than a mile from home.

“And what am I now? How structureless all my history is! What I have just written applies to the last four or five years of my life; and applies to me at this moment. Am I fairly good? or am I very bad? Five or six men are, I know, this moment in love with me; and I have been proud to think they are so. Though I have no love for them myself, is not that bad? But somehow, when I think it over, it makes me feel, not how bad I am, but how lonely I am. I have never in my whole life been myself to any one. I have so many unuttered thoughts troubling me, and increasing in number, and there is nobody to whom I can tell any of them. I don't know what I should have been could I only have met some one who would have helped me to live—with whom I could have shared something beyond a part of his income and the parentage of two children—a number that never will be added to.

“Oh, you—what have you done to me!

You took me—you *would* marry me. You took an entire life, and you sacrificed it, in order to ornament one small corner of your own. And I—I tried to love you. I waited for you and watched for you during your absence. I ran to meet you when you came. Your own mind was for me like waterless sand; none of my thoughts would grow in it. I found that out; and then what I tried to do was to share that desert with you, acting as if it were some oasis. And I should have succeeded in this had you let me; in some sort I would have learned to love you: but you repulsed me. Do you remember that night when you struck me, and when I kissed you because I saw that you were sorry? You were sorry you struck me. You were sorry you had struck a woman. You were ashamed of yourself; but not even then did you show any tenderness for me. It is not the blow I remember with any bitterness, but your conduct after.

“And now, whom can I speak to? As I have said, to no one. You have made me
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bitterly wise. You have taken even my mother from me. Not even to her can I speak with perfect confidence. You have made me feel that she sacrificed her daughter, treated her daughter as a thing without heart or soul. You have driven me into the company of waters, and woods, and sunsets. In nature I do feel a vague something that touches me, that moves in me the religious impulse, that calls me out of myself. And yet whenever I see a beautiful thing, along with the sense of its beauty I have this sense also—that I have no one to whom I can turn and say, ‘How beautiful!’

“Mother, perhaps, would tell me that I ought to make the best of things. I know she thinks I could be happy and successful socially. Could I? How little she understands the situation as it really is! She sees me, just as I too, for that matter, can see myself in the glass—a woman dressed perfectly from her hat to the tips of her toes: she sees how certain shades of colour become me. She has sometimes told me that I am like an

exquisite picture. I like to believe I am ; but for all that, I am isolated, and shall always be so. Mother wouldn't wish me to be bad ; and I can't be worldly. Great ladies frighten me : bad women repel me. What a simple life would content me, if I could only live it ! I had a simple life once ; but mother, for my good, took me away from that ; and as far as my soul and my thoughts go, I have now no life at all.

“ And yet I am ungrateful. One treasure I have, though one only—my children. They keep me alive ; they prevent my soul from dying. If there is any revelation at all, my children reveal God to me. Oh, my beloved ones, let me pour out my heart to you ! Let me spend and be spent for you. My little ones, forgive your mother, for I have sometimes been so selfish as this :—I have wished that you might be ill and suffering, that I might wear myself out in tending you.

“ And yet, my little ones, there are solitudes in your mother's heart which you even cannot

fill. She can be your companion, but in some ways you cannot be hers."

Mrs. Schilizzi, when she finished her reading, with a listless deliberation took up her pen, and though her hand trembled as she did so, she set herself to resume her writing. She tried to continue her narrative without any formal break ; but having completed a sentence or two she presently scratched them out, and abandoning all attempt at literary form or consistency, she abruptly put down the date, and slowly, but without hesitation, wrote the following few lines, which might have come from the diary of a child—

"I am at Lichtenbourg now. All these papers were written here. I like it very much ; it is a very pretty place, and it suits the children ; but except for them, and a silly, good-looking Austrian, whom I don't count, I have as usual had not a soul to speak to. That is why I have tried to solace myself with a diary. But this evening, to my astonishment, who should appear but Mr. Grenville ? And he spoke to me very kindly, and seemed glad

to see me. I believe he is kind, really. I thought him so when I was here with him before; only I came afterwards to fancy that he was only laughing at me, or amusing himself by pretending to be kind, and so drawing me out. I felt, when I was under that impression, as if I could have died of shame; and I was hurt and miserable. But now that impression has passed away, and I am beginning to feel grateful to him. A little kindness—a little real kindness—quite upsets me. Oh, how my head is aching! If I think more I shall cry, and make a fool of myself. I will kiss my children, and then try to sleep. Irma, darling, darling, I shall have you by my side."

CHAPTER XIII.

GRENVILLE, who was bent on making his expedition to the castle, and who was anxious to secure Mrs. Schilizzi as his companion, was annoyed, as he dressed next morning, to remember her account of her occupations, and to think that it was many hours before he could hope to see her. Just, however, as he was about to leave the hotel, in order to pay an early visit to the springs, a neat-looking maid tripped after him with a note, scribbled in pencil, and consisting of the following words—"I am not well, and shall not be busy this morning. If you can do so, will you take me for a walk at eleven?—IRMA SCHILIZZI."

Grenville was delighted, and sent back "Yes" for an answer. Thinking over his

late experiences, and contrasting them with his position at present, Lichtenbourg seemed to him the most charming place in the world. He felt as if the spirit of freedom were impregnating the air, and he inhaled it each time he breathed. He was conscious of vigour alike in his mind and limbs; and work and enjoyment shone in an equal sunlight.

At eleven o'clock he and Mrs. Schilizzi met by the glittering kiosque. Close to this was a bed purple with violets; they both stooped for a draught of the pure delightful perfume; and they went off together as if the soul of the spring were in their pulses. As they passed through the town, the entire world looked young. Sunshine basked on all the people they came across, and varnished the wares at the doors of the little shops, where shop-keeping had the air of idle, happy-hearted play.

"Look," said Mrs. Schilizzi, as they passed a villa-garden, "at the bells of the magnolias white in the blue sky!"

Grenville, having looked, stood still for a moment. "You know," he said, "how princes

and princesses in fairy-tales are transformed into cats and lions and every kind of shape. It seems to me to-day as if happiness had been transformed into flowers."

His own happiness was such, indeed, that he had gone on walking beside her, without any thought of what direction they were taking; but realizing presently that they had left the town behind them, he said to her, "Where are we going? have you any idea? I've not."

"I am taking you," she said, "to a place I've found out myself. Do you see this river which comes flowing out of the woods and valleys? We are going to turn into the foot-path which skirts it beside the willows."

They left the road, following the course she indicated. Birds sang with the water, and all the foliage whispered. At last they reached a curious timbered mill, with which was united a simple but picturesque restaurant. There was a garden containing arbours, and a large inviting summer-house. "I often," said Mrs. Schilizzi, "bring my children to tea here. The woman gives them such beautiful cakes

and biscuits ; and early in the season, she tells me, it is always perfectly quiet. You mustn't think I do nothing but talk to Austrian officers."

They passed through the gate and seated themselves on the green benches of the summer-house. "I'm a little tired," she said. "Will you order a cup of coffee for me? Last night I was restless and hardly slept at all. It would have been nice to have breakfasted here; but I must go back to my children. Ah!" she went on, when the coffee was brought out to her, "how peaceful this place is! Will you tell me, while we rest—for you have not told me yet—what you have seen in Italy, and why you have returned to Lichtenbourg?"

They had attempted during their walk no serious conversation ; and the consequence was they were now quietly at their ease with each other.

"Well," answered Grenville, smiling, "as to my return to Lichtenbourg, if you will promise me not to be sceptical, I will tell you

what I believe to be the reason. I believe⁴ that old castle, whose pictures the Princess showed us, must have mesmerized and brought me back here ; for I am determined to go and see it. It is only ten miles away. You think I am laughing at you ; I see that in your face. But I am not : only—”

“ Only what ? ”

“ The question you asked me sounded a very simple one, but to answer it truly, do you know what I should have to inflict on you ? A long discourse on the philosophy of life generally—especially upon prose and poetry, and the types of life that correspond to them.”

“ Go on,” she said, starting with surprise and pleasure. “ This is what I like listening to.”

He hesitated a little as if doubtful how to express himself. “ You know,” he began, “ how all our modern philosophers denounce as useless the life of the contemplative monastic orders. Virtue, they say, is utility, not private perfection. But to Christian

critics, at all events, the monks and nuns have an answer. Different people have different works in the world. Theirs is to realize completely certain spiritual possibilities, which every Christian, it is assumed, should try to realize partially. Well—what saints are to men as Christian beings, poets are to men as human beings. The highest use of the practical man is to improve the environment of life ; the use of the poet is to develop the spiritual organism, or to be an example of its development. Do you see my meaning ?”

“Yes,” she said eagerly ; “of course I do.”

“I talk of poets,” he continued ; “but you understand, of course, that I don’t mean merely people who write verses. I mean people generally, whose chief desire and necessity is to live the life of which poetry is the literary expression ; for poetry is merely the body, of which those who appreciate it are the soul. I don’t want to be sentimental ; but I think I may say this : few people can write good love-poems ; but whoever loves deeply lives one.”

"Go on," she murmured; "your words are like carrier-pigeons. My feelings have wings, but my words can hardly flutter."

He hesitated, and then said—

"I am urging all this, as you will see presently, in order to shield myself from my own self-criticism. I want to show to you, and to myself too, that the emotional or poetic life has, on practical grounds, as good a claim to be cultivated and respected as the practical life. I am not thinking specially of love, though I took that as an example, but of every kind of feeling that fills the heart with music, or lifts it with aspiration. Just take a type or two of the two kinds of life. Take Shelley, or Goethe, or Horace, or Sir Walter Scott—and then take Napoleon, or the Duke of Wellington, or James Watt. Compared with a campaign, or a revolution, or the introduction of steam-power, what a trifling thing a poem seems—a butterfly as compared to a locomotive. And yet all that gives meaning to such things as these—to the hurrying train or steamer, or miles of

military pageant—to courage, or to triumph, or to industry—is, the jewels that the poets brighten. Poetry—let me go on; let me tell you how I define poetry—it is the emotional expression of a sense of life's value. I don't mean that a poem need be all sentiment. Poems like 'Faust' and 'Hamlet' may be full of the profoundest thought; but thought in poetry is always thought which is in direct connection with emotion; and that emotion, whatever it may be, depends upon some belief in the value and the beauty of life. Well, such being the case, I put the matter in this way. Poetry is adoration secularized; and the poetic life, or, if you like to call it so, the romantic life, is the monastic life secularized. You may say that this life is useless, and in one sense so it is. But it has the same sort of use which the life has which aims at complete sanctity. It embodies and pursues an ideal just as truly as the life of any community vowed to perpetual adoration. What are you listening to? The clock? Yes—it is striking twelve."

"We must go," she said. "My children breakfast in half an hour. Don't stop what you were saying. Finish it as we walk back."

"A love-match," he resumed, as soon as they were on their way—"we have both of us sense enough to talk about these things rationally—I mean a marriage which has nothing but love to recommend it, is an attempt at the poetic life, even if not always an attainment of it. Most people—and in most cases they are right—think such a marriage ridiculous. The reason is that the lovers have rarely a true vocation. You see," he went on, jerking a stone into the river, and speaking in a matter-of-fact voice as if he were reading an advertisement, "the need for this kind of life varies in intensity in different natures. But I believe, though I have never been fortunate enough to prove the belief by experience, that for some people who find affection, and who leave for its sake houses and lands and ambition, the heavens are opened as truly as they were for Stephen."

They were both silent for a time, not from any sense of embarrassment, but merely because respectively they were following out their own thoughts. At last she said gently, "But Stephen's vision was a dream."

"Yes," exclaimed Grenville, losing the reserve of his manner; "and what higher end could there be for all practical activity, for all public careers, for all social reforms, than to make beds for all of us, on which to dream dreams like these?"

Again there was silence, which presently he interrupted with a laugh. She looked at him narrowly, and asked him what amused him.

"Merely to think," he said, "how far I must seem to have strayed from the question you asked me—why I came back to Lichtenbourg? However, what we have just been saying will help me to tell you why. I have no true vocation for the higher, for the ideal life, whether poetic or religious. My lot is cast amongst the secular and prosaic ploughlands, where ambition sows and reaps. But

I once was allured by the other life; and at times it allures me still, and I long to escape to that happy world of the imagination where those for whom poetry has no direct message can hear its echoes in the lives of others, and of other ages. The world of the imagination I find now in this country. 'It represents poetry to me. It liberates me from the prison of my circumstances. Italy last week represented prose—and there you have the reason why I have ever come back here. I am, in fact, like a school-boy who has run home from school. Do you understand all this nonsense?'

"Yes," she said, "yes. I didn't answer you, for I was thinking about it. Of course," she went on, "people must act and work. Goethe, indeed, said that action is the cure of doubt; but to me—well, to me it seems the cure of aspiration also. I speak only for myself. Personally, I want not to act, but to be. That is the reason of my interest in what you said about saints and poets. But I don't, in one point, quite agree with you.

Poetry, the sense of beauty, and the aspiration for something beyond, which comes from the sense of beauty as the scent comes from a flower—you say that this is religion secularized; I should be content to say simply that it is religion. And I should wish, if I knew how, to lead the religious life. I sometimes think that it is wicked to feel like this—that it is wishing to be selfish and useless; but what you have said reassures me a little. Besides, when a woman—when a woman says she wishes not to act, but to be, her real wish, I suppose, is to be something for the sake of somebody else. Take me, for instance. I wish it principally for the sake of my children. My children are my religion, or at least the practical part of it. The next religious service will be their breakfast or luncheon. Will you assist at it? If you will, you will be very welcome; and you will see what I think is the real triumph of management—that I have got the *chef* to make me a genuine child's rice-pudding."

He was not only pleased but touched by

the homely invitation. As he entered the *salon* with her, where the cloth was already spread, she said to him—

“I am sure you must think me very stupid; and I know I am so: only with you I *seem* more stupid even than I am. You keep me silent by giving me so much to think of.”

Had she made such a speech to him when first he began to know her, he would have certainly tried to respond to it with some species of compliment; but in presence of her complete simplicity compliments seemed out of place, and almost cruel; and his only answer was, “No, you are not stupid.”

The children rushed to their mother, bright as if her coming were sunlight; and then turning to Grenville, whom they recognized as an old friend, they gave him a share of the smiles which their mother had called into existence. A sense of partnership with her subtly stole into his heart, and spread its enchantment over the whole simple meal. This was deepened from time to time by the

gentle, unconscious way in which she asked him to do this and that for the children, as if he were a friend whom she might call on for all assistance; and through the happy sounds of the present, echoes of their morning's conversation made a vibrating music, and the ripple of the river sang to him.

The children had a passion for flowers, and asked Grenville, who told them that he had seen quantities in the meadows, why he had not brought them some.

"Suppose," he said to their mother, "that we have tea at the mill. They can, as we go, pick flowers to their hearts' content."

The children were delighted at the proposal; and the mother's eyes had assented even before her lips did.

"Let us go at five," she said. "Till then it is too hot."

"In that case," he answered, "hot as it is, I will fill up the time between by a visit to Count T——. I have an introduction to him, and I hear he has just arrived; and no

doubt he will tell us something about the country."

The Count's castle, perched on its wooded eminence, could be reached on foot by a climb of half an hour. Grenville's visit was in every way satisfactory; and when he rejoined his friends and went off to the mill with them, he was full of accounts of what he had heard and seen. "The castle," he said, "of which the Princess told us, can be reached from here easily; and the Count assures me it is the most curious place in the country. He was particularly anxious also that I should go to a place of his own—an hotel which he has built in the heart of one of his forests, near a lake and a mineral spring, and which is going to be opened presently. He has a hunting-lodge close by, which, if I cared for fishing, he said would be at my disposal for as long as I chose to occupy it. Suppose one day we accept this handsome offer, so far as to drive over there, and use the lodge for a picnic."

They were sitting in the summer-house, the

scene of their morning's talk, hearing the mill-wheel turn with its plunging murmur, and watching the children as they went to and fro like butterflies. Presently at the gate of the garden appeared an itinerant flute-player, who began some simple melody, the notes of which were sweet as a thrush's. The children dropped their flowers, and ran off to listen to him. Mrs. Schilizzi, pleased with the scene before her, seemed pleased still farther at the idea of the proposed expedition. Seeing this, Grenville continued, "I have something else to propose besides. The castle we were speaking of belongs to a Baron K——, who has two rooms in it, which he occupies for a week sometimes; and he is, the Count tells me, expected there in a day or two. While he is in residence, the castle is closed to strangers. So what do you say? Do you think you would have the energy to take time by the forelock, and go there with me to-morrow?"

"Listen to the flute," she said. "To-day has been full of music. To go to the castle would make to-morrow full of it also. Find

out about getting there, and this evening I will tell you if I can manage it."

He met her at the band, after dinner. They stayed there for a short time only. The scene struck both of them as artificial, after their late experiences; but he sat with her long enough to convince her that the expedition was an easy one, and when he said good-night to her she had agreed to undertake it with him. It was too long for the children, so she stipulated for a late start, which would leave them their mother's company for nearly all the morning. An hour's drive, and half an hour in the train, brought them to a station almost at the foot of the castle. It was a station which stood amongst flat fields and furrows, and all around were hills covered with forest. Here and there some peasant women were working; the roads were nothing but primitive unfenced tracks; silence and sunshine slept on the whole country. And straight before them, rising from the quiet levels, was a spire of rock, covered with wood, and gleaming with roofs and turrets.

Mrs. Schilizzi stood still, contemplating it.

"It is like a stage," she exclaimed, "ready for some mediæval drama. Since you began to talk to me, my imagination is always working. This is literally a country of romance."

Near as the castle was—they seemed indeed to be almost under it—they had before them harder work than they bargained for. The beginning of the ascent was up some grassy slopes, which brought them at last to a grove of ragged pine-trees ; and here, gray amongst the foliage, they discovered a moss-grown tower. Passing through this by a gateway, they found themselves on a rising road, with a battlemented wall on the outer side, and impending precipices on the inner ; and it wound upwards round the rock like a corkscrew. At every fifty yards they came to a fresh tower, with an iron door and a mouldering coat-of-arms, and now and then to a gap spanned by a creaking drawbridge. The ascent was so steep and long, and the whole scene was so singular, that they often paused, at once to rest and to

think. Down below them were the fields at an increasing depth, up in the air were the walls and gables of the castle. Even Fritz, who had accompanied them, was overcome with the spectacle, and said to his master—

“Sir, if these trees could talk, what strange things they would tell!”

As for Grenville and Mrs. Schilizzi, they hardly spoke at all. He at first had made one or two observations; but she presently said—

“Don’t talk. I feel as if I were in a cathedral.”

They were conscious, however, of thinking the same thoughts; and by and by, seeing that she was growing tired, he had merely to look at her, and without thanks or apology she took his arm, and silently leaned her weight on it.

Thus they reached the summit. Under some archways hung a smell of wood-smoke; and here and there a few cocks and hens were straying. These were the first signs of life they had come across; and Fritz was sent to

see if he could find the custodian. Grenville and his companion found themselves meanwhile in an irregular courtyard, filled with old copper water-tanks, and surrounded by a medley of doors, arcades, and windows. One of the doors was open. Mrs. Schilizzi looked in, and discovered a miniature chapel, hanging on the very edge of the precipice. There was a book on the altar, some candlesticks, and some fragments of gold lace; and some fixed worm-eaten seats, which would have held perhaps twenty worshippers. The air seemed full to her of the prayers of dead generations, and suddenly she realized that in the seat nearest the altar was a kneeling figure, habited in full armour, with its gauntleted hands clasped, and stretched towards the crucifix. She felt instinctively, what she afterwards discovered was the truth, that for hundreds of years this figure had remained there kneeling. Moved and awed, she hardly could tell why, she herself too sank on her knees, and half outstretched her hands in a similar rapt attitude. In a few minutes' time she rejoined Grenville

outside. He saw that she wished to speak, but was afraid of her own voice. She found it at last, and taking hold of one of the buttons of his coat, she said—

“Do you remember, at the foot of the hill we passed a poor woman, who was sitting with a sick baby? I want to go down, and see if we can't help her. I want to help some one—I want to do something good. Do you think me off my head? What is happening to me? I hardly know myself.”

He saw her swallow some strong access of agitation. He saw the effort undulate in her throat.

“Wait,” he said, “for a moment. Here is Fritz with the custodian. Fritz, at the foot of the castle was a poor woman with a baby. Give her a florin; ask if she wants help; and tell her the lady will presently come and speak to her.”

“She is here,” said Fritz. “She is the custodian's wife. I think they are only tired. It is a long way to get up here.”

The woman was entering the court at the

very moment. Mrs. Schilizzi almost ran towards her; but moving gently as soon as she got near, spoke to her in a voice so kindly, that the woman looked up in wonder. Grenville saw her presently take the child in her arms, and carrying it, go with the mother through some low shadowy archway. The rose of her face presently came back again into the daylight.

"I know," she said, "what it is that the child wants. I have told the woman it shall be sent to-morrow to her from Lichtenbourg."

They now proceeded to follow the custodian through the building. The rooms they entered were full of dust and echoes. They were bare of all furniture except a few dilapidated tables, and a multitude of rude portraits hanging on the whitewashed walls. But in place of furniture, in one room after another, were piles of rusty armour, heaped up like hay-stacks. They saw the quarters which the Baron was shortly to occupy, once the priest's, and almost as bare as the others. Saints and scenes from the Bible, half obliterated by time, were

daubed on the rough plaster ; and if it had not been for some china pipes on racks, and some pairs of Hessian boots, they would still have seemed the abode of some ascetic of the Middle Ages. By and by the sight-seers found themselves in the open air again. They were on a narrow platform, hanging over the precipice ; and all about them were loop-holed turrets and batteries, clinging to the rock like swallows' nests, and connected by scrambling stairs. The hush came over them which is caused by the spectacle of a great depth. Presently they saw at one side of them a little triangular garden, supported on a ledge by parapets, and reached by some rough steps. There were a few bushes in it, and a bench on which they seated themselves. Looking towards the custodian they noticed that his head was bare. A second glance showed them he was standing under a wooden crucifix. There was in his face a manliness mixed with melancholy, and a hardy devout patience, that seemed strangely in keeping with the gaunt sacred image, embrowned by a thousand

storms. They called him to them, and talked to him. He was grateful for their interest in his child, and showed a simple pleasure in telling them of his monotonous life. Once each week either he or his wife descended to the world below to purchase their scant necessities; otherwise, they lived alone in this aerial solitude. Once a year a priest said mass in the chapel; once a year the Baron came for a day or two; and now and then some sight-seers. His life was varied by no incidents but these. They asked him to look for Fritz, and tell him to go on to the station and see that their dinner was ready for them, which they had ordered at the small restaurant.

The man went and left them alone together.

"You mustn't," she said presently, "take me to any more places like this."

"Why not?" he asked.

"I can't tell why it is," she said, "but they overwhelm me. If one's soul, if one's imagination, has a heart, as one's body has, they make mine throb and beat so that I can

hardly live." She turned her eyes to him, sad like an evening sky. "I have lived," she said, "so seldom, or rather not at all. I am not accustomed to it." Presently she went on: "I don't know why I feel like this; but it's you, I think, who have set my imagination going. This is literally a country of romance. You are right about it. I feel it all as you do. It makes all the fetters of reality melt into dreams, and become unreal, and leave one free. I am a child again: all my life is before me. Oh, to live! To be oneself, as one had hoped to be!"

He heard her murmur to herself something that had the sound of verse. He asked her what she said.

"Nothing," she replied. "Or it is *à propos* of nothing. It was some lines, I think, translated from the second part of Faust—"

'Here the unspeakable
Grows to fulfilment.'

I don't know why I said them. Here in this high silence the past seems face to face with

one. Or is it the past? I can't tell what it is. Look at the sunset. That too seems to be part of it."

"It is," said Grenville, "what yesterday I called poetry. I see you understand quite as well as I do—better even. I only stand on tip-toe; you float on the air."

"I wonder," she murmured, "if we have any right to float. Perhaps we were made only to walk—to plod."

"That," said Grenville, "is a question we must each answer for ourselves. What is folly in most people is elevation in some. Fancy St. Francis promoting a company; or a stock-broker in an ecstasy, like St. Francis! You know," he went on presently, "that space has three dimensions. So has life; and as led by different people, it may consist of different movements—of lateral movements, like those of a cart-horse; or of a movement upwards. The movement upwards is the movement of saints, and poets, and yourself. The reason is that they and that you have wings. I have long lost mine. They fell from me with my

boy's curls : and yet when you talk I feel the fanning of yours."

She rose from her seat, and looked down at him with a smile that had something of amusement in it.

"Do you know what you do?" she said. "It is something that you shouldn't. Instead of saying what is true about yourself, you are saying what is the exact opposite. Look at your watch, will you ; for I think, to judge by the light, that instead of a movement upwards, we ought to begin one downwards."

As they went together descending the winding road, unnoticed by him she often turned and looked at him, with the curious intentness of a child.

Suddenly she said, laughing, "Had you curls when you were a little boy?"

He laughed too, and again admitted that he had.

"When you were a little boy," she asked, "what name did they call you?"

He told her it was "Bobby."

She repeated the word softly. "That," she

said, "was my brother's name." She looked him in the face for a moment, and once more repeated, "Bobby."

"And you," he said, "when you were a little girl, I know what they called you; for your name no one would alter. It was Irma—Miss Irma—little Irma. Did not they call you that? I wrote a poem once to a person of that name. I did indeed—and not very long ago."

She stopped short, and looked at him, reddening with a painful flush. He went on rapidly—"It was to a very small person. It was to Irma, your little daughter."

She caught her breath sharply, as if with sudden relief; then he saw the shadows of her throat tremble. She gasped, "You must tell me the verses—not now—but some day." And her eyes before she could avert them had filled suddenly with tears.

CHAPTER XIV.

THAT evening before she went to bed, inspired by the events of the day, she produced the sheets of her diary ; and having given her children's eyelids the gentle benediction of her kiss, she leaned her head on her hand, and began writing as follows—

“Am I sad or happy ? I don't know. I never felt as I feel now, before. I am quite bewildered. I wish I was a child again, and had mother to guide me. And yet, why ? What is there to make a fuss about. Only a very pleasant thing has happened to me ; which, though to me it is surprising, is surely in itself very commonplace ; but I find it quite new. How baldly and badly I put things : what has happened is this. I have

met a man who cares to talk to me because he understands my thoughts. He likes me for what is human in me, not for what is animal ; and he does not look at me with the eyes of a cowardly beast of prey. At first, indeed, he did not care to look at me at all, but even that is better than the ways of other men : though I confess that there have been times—months, I think—perhaps one whole year, when I allowed my vanity to be flattered by those men's admiration. I thought any sort of attention was better than none, then. Again—as to this man, I thought at first that he laughed at me. Perhaps he did. Socially I knew he thought nothing of me ; and I'm sure he thinks nothing now. But of that I am glad ; for somehow it makes the change in him seem deeper and more sincere. He is sincere, I am sure ; for only once—and then it seemed forced and unnatural—has he paid me a single compliment, except that one compliment of understanding me.

“To be understood ! The sensation is so strange to me that it makes me a new

creature. My mind, my tastes, my feelings have all become new things. Bobby—I mean dear Bobby, my sailor brother—once described to me his delight when in some strange place in the East he heard the sound of his own language. For the first time in my life I have heard some one else talk mine. Mr. Grenville does more. He not only talks my language, but enlarges it for me. In addition to saying what I have often myself said before, he says other things I have only tried to say; and again others which I have never even thought of, but which become mine the moment he has said them. He seems to have liberated in me a host of thoughts that were in prison. He is the fairy prince who has entered the sleeping palace.'

"What have I written? Perhaps I shouldn't have written that: and yet I am reassured, so far as regards him, by seeing that I have written it so naturally. It is a witness to the fact that he has never tried to make love to me. He might easily have tried to do so, and

so have destroyed everything. But I noticed this, that whenever matters of sentiment were talked about, everything personal or even emotional was carefully banished from his manner; and he contrived to give me the same unembarrassed feeling I might have had if we were talking politics:—no, much more unembarrassed than that; for I couldn't talk politics if I tried.

“And yet for certain reasons this is making me feel fearful and anxious. To be understood in this way spoils me. It is taking me away from the hard benches and starved table of a school to which I must soon go back, and is showing me what life might be—a thing I had best forget. His understanding has made mine, which was once so barren, become green like fields in spring. I feel as if I were floating—as if I were being taken off my feet. He—no, not he—I didn't mean that—I mean the fact that he has understood me, makes my thoughts rise like a kite rising on the wind.”

Her next day's record was this—

“We are going to-morrow to see Count

T——'s hotel in the forest. Every sunrise now brings with it something to hope for. Mr. Grenville came in after the children's dinner to arrange how we should go. I am happy ; for an accident occurred which confirms me in all I thought about him ; and yet, as for me, if I think of myself merely, I ought, I suppose, to blush at it. Indeed it touches myself so closely that I hardly know how to write it ; and yet, apart from me, it was so simple. What occurred was this.

“ The waiter, in laying the table, had moved some of my books—a pile of them—and had put them on a chair near the window. Many of them were English poets. Mr. Grenville took some of them up, and said something about the library with which I travelled. I thought of telling him—but I had not the courage to do so—that I was making some notes on the different moods and ways in which English poets had approached and treated Nature.

“ ‘ I see,’ he said, ‘ you have underlined a great deal of Wordsworth.’

“And all of a sudden, under Wordsworth, he came on a heap of horrible French novels. I never had meant to bring them; I thought they were burnt: but some had been left, and Julie packed them up by mistake. I call them horrible; but as I said before, they were classics. They were not books it need necessarily be a disgrace to read. But the moment he noticed them, I saw him give a look at me, and his tone changed and grew cold.

“‘Your tastes are certainly catholic,’ he said, as he took one of them up.

“‘They are not,’ I exclaimed, ‘if you mean I’ve a taste for those. They were packed by mistake. They’ve no business to be here. They were given me. I meant to have burnt them. I wish you would put them into the fire for me.’ I don’t know how I said all this; but he saw I was sincere at all events; for he looked relieved, and his old manner came back to him. But I still felt shy and awkward, and hurried on to explain myself. I observed what a pity it was that books of so much genius should have so much

in them one regretted having even looked at. 'One is always being told,' I went on, 'that they are justified by the fact of their being true: and perhaps they are true—I can't tell about that; but on me the impression which they leave, is not that they are true, but that they are bad.'

"Now I am perfectly certain, though I cannot tell how I became so—I am certain that he thought these books bad, dangerous—how shall I put it?—for me personally. And he was right—there is evil in every one of us. But without dropping the subject, which might have put me to shame so easily, he gave our discussion a turn which completely separated it from myself.

" 'I am exactly like you,' he said, 'in the way I regard the matter. Like you, I recognize that these books have genius, and that, compared with novels expressly written for the school-room, they have truth; but I have the same sense which you have, that for some people they are bad. For people like ourselves, however, their offensive quality is, I

believe, their artistic badness, far more than their moral badness. Oddly enough, in the train, when I came from Paris to Vienna, I was talking to a man—by the way, he is the doctor here—about this very subject; and he helped me to see the matter clearly. I believe that in novels written for grown-up people all sides of life should be treated with equal fairness; but the human imagination is so constituted, that six lines written about certain things will impress us as distinctly as six pages written about others. The French school we are talking of wholly forget this, and although they may not give more words to man's lower nature than to his higher, they produce on the mind of the reader a far more vivid impression of it. There is the artistic badness. The moral badness is this—that the impression thus produced is not only disproportionate, but it tends to corrupt the judgment long before it has appealed to it.'

"How true this is! I myself feel its truth so keenly, that I could hardly have thought it possible to discuss it without embarrass-

ment. But it was Mr. Grenville's whole manner, as well as his actual phrases, which made everything easy, and surrounded one with a cleanly atmosphere. I was more grateful to him than I can say for his chivalrous delicacy towards myself. Could any brother be kinder—or so kind?

“He took the books with him. May I never see them again—them, or any like them.

“I was just preparing to put my papers away, when—shall I really put it down, the little silly thing that has happened? On the table at which I write stands a small looking-glass in a Dresden china frame. Quite by accident I have seen my face in it; and I have seen, and said to myself, that I do—well, that I do look charming. Mr. Grenville, I believe, doesn't think me a bit pretty. Most men have thought nothing else about me. I'm glad Mr. Grenville is as he is. I like him to see in me the good points I am in doubt about, not those about which I can't help being certain. And yet, being a woman,

I should like him to see my prettiness, just as a fact of nature. Shall I ask him if he does so? Stop! what am I writing? How vain—how vain! I ought to be above such thoughts. I have forgotten them.

“To-morrow—let me think of that—we are going into the heart of the forest. These expeditions to me are like her first balls to a girl. Everything now is so unaccountably, so unfathomably fresh to me.”

Before composing herself to sleep she knelt up in her bed, her hands crossed on the folds of her white drapery. She did not, even mentally, say any definite word, for the influences to which, as she grew up, her religion had been subjected, hardly admitted of this; but she let her soul open itself to something beyond her and above her, as she rested for some moments in the attitude of an infant Samuel. When she closed her eyes now there was no frown on her forehead, but a placid faith in the day towards which sleep would waft her.

Faith in this case was certainly not dis-

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appointed. A light varnished carriage, whose brownness shone in the morning, adapted for rough roads, and drawn by four active little horses, who jingled bells as they moved and tossed red tassels, took them away with a speed that was in itself exhilaration. Out of the town they sped, through valleys and fields and orchards. Then came ground that was wilder, plantations of pine, and spaces covered with pine-needles. Rocks cropped up through the soil, and prickly bushes dotted it. At last they entered a great undulating forest, where the branches whispered and the breath of the pine-trees floated. Through this they drove for a good two hours at least, encountering all the way hardly a sign of life, except some men who, in one place, were busy mending the road, and a waggon which they overtook, laden with chairs and tables, and which, as they surmised, must be bound for the Count's hotel.

They had arranged to picnic in the hunting-lodge, and go to the hotel from thence. A rising slope, covered with heath and bog-

myrtle, at last appeared, like an island in the sea of foliage. Driving up this, and passing through a belt of trees, they saw the lodge before them—a whitewashed building, with a high-pitched tiled roof, and an open arcade by which the few rooms were connected. Fritz soon produced the forester and his wife, who took charge of it; and having made them aware who his master was, it was hardly a minute before the principal doors were open, and their hamper of provisions was being carried into the principal sitting-room.

Mrs. Schilizzi was in the happiest mood possible, and Grenville had caught it from her, in all its buoyant freshness. They insisted on being left to unpack their hamper for themselves; and she exclaimed with delight at the various delicacies contained in it, taxing him, as if he were a boy, with being wrong and extravagant in having ordered them. Every package opened had all the savour of a discovery; every missing requisite, which they asked the old woman to supply, was the occasion of an adventure. Grenville

ran her to earth in her own kitchen regions, and came back with stories of her pots and pans and her cooking-stove, and she presently followed him in with a pile of thick white plates, and with some old Bohemian glasses having coats-of-arms in colour on them. Whilst she was arranging them, eager to do her utmost, Grenville and Mrs. Schilizzi took stock of the room—its bare polished floor, its velvet chairs and sofas, stiffly grouped together at one end round a table; they peeped into a writing-room, and a charming bed-room beyond; they examined some pieces of tapestry and a large number of horns, which formed the only decorations of the rudely distempered walls; and at last they went to the windows. They turned to each other with looks and expressions of admiration, for straight before them, at a distance of a hundred feet or so, was the smooth glass of a lake, full of the sky and pine-woods, which stretched itself out to a breadth of fully a mile, and reached away curving into some indefinite distance.

Charmed by this unexpected prospect, they now turned to their meal, which was happy like a meal of children. Its microscopic incidents were sufficient to fill the moment—the pouring out of the wine, the cutting up of the chicken, the extracting the salt from the paper packets that held it. They experienced together the most charming form of confidence—the unaccustomed sharing in the enjoyment of little things such as these. No thought seemed too small to communicate, no sense of amusement too trifling to share. Then they went out to inspect the landscape in the neighbourhood, having first asked the way to the Count's hotel. The way, they presently found, hardly required asking; for the building was full in sight, at about a furlong's distance. It stood near to the lake, and was somewhat Swiss in appearance, surrounded with wooden balconies, and shaded by projecting roofs. They entered. It was full of a smell of newly-planed wood and varnish. Though it was not yet open, the furnishing was nearly complete, and the

manager was beside himself with delight at showing his accommodation to the strangers. Some private suites were fit for immediate occupation; everything was ready but the fittings for the public rooms. "The air," said the manager, "owing to the nearness of the pine-trees, is supposed to be healthier even than that of Lichtenbourg, and the neighbouring mineral spring has properties quite unique. Will not your excellencies honour me by taking coffee?"

They told him that the woman at the lodge was at that moment preparing some, and they slowly strolled back enchanted with all about them. There were grassy slopes, tufted with aromatic shrubs; there were glimpses of cart-tracks leading away into the forest; there were reeds by the lake-side up to their waists in water; and a beech-tree in front of the lodge made a shade on the warm soil. Here they had their coffee; their tray rested on the beech-husks, and they themselves lay on some rugs beside it. During luncheon everything reminded her of incidents in her

childhood, of picnics with her brothers and sisters, and of absurd shifts they were put to. She told him how Dick stole her pocket-handkerchief for a napkin, and how Olga used to say, "Do look at Irma gobbling." And Grenville had thought, though he forbore to tell her so, that he saw that submerged childhood shining still mischievous in her eyes. Now, however, her mood had become more pensive. She talked not of the amusements of her childhood, but of its charms and dreams. "There were reeds like those," she said, "in a lake that was near our home. I used often to sit by them and wonder how Pan could have made his pipes." Then gradually one thing after another recalled to her her father's garden, its tall trees and its flower-beds. Each memory as it floated into her mind shaped itself into artless words; and occasionally she would call Grenville's attention to something in the scene before her—some ripple of sunlight on the lake, or the ruddy or silvery bark of some gleaming tree, which appealed to her for its own sake only.

This extraordinary quality in her of sensitiveness to natural beauty, struck Grenville afresh ; and as they were driving back he at last gave his thoughts utterance.

"I have been wondering," he said, "since the mere colouring of scenes like these appeals so strongly to your sense of beauty and your imagination, how you would be affected by such a country as Italy."

"Ah," she exclaimed, "if I could only see it !"

"All sorts of scenes, and objects, and aspects of things," he went on, "are floating into my mind at this moment, the beauty of which would, I am sure, make you hold your breath."

"Tell me," she said. "What sort of things ?"

He answered her slowly, as if he were talking to himself, and enumerating chance memories.

"The marble peaks," he began, "of the pure Carrara mountains, rising out of violet mist, and glittering in a sky of primrose-

colour; the crescent of turquoise waves, which one sees framed by the ilexes under whose shadow Shelley wrote *The Cenci*; sands white like an arum-lily I have walked by in the hush of the morning, whilst the dark blue waters slept on them; boats gliding on Lake Como, with sails like the breasts of swans—I should like to be with you when you were looking at things like these—when you were hearing the songs of the peasants floating at dusk amongst the fire-flies, or the notes of the angelus vibrate, some near, some distant, from half a dozen craggy villages amongst the Apennines.”

“That is enough,” she said. “Let me think a little of that. Every word is a picture; I wish we could see it all.” Then suddenly she turned to him, and, looking at him with a smile of curiosity, “But you told me,” she said, “that Italy was a place that represented prose to you.”

She heard him sigh faintly, and for a moment he did not speak. “I remember,” he said at last; “but that was only on a

special occasion ; and it was due to—how shall we put it?—to extraneous, or (shall we say ?) adventitious, circumstances.”

“What grand words !” she laughed. “I wonder what the circumstances were.”

“I am not sure whether, supposing you care to hear, I may not one day tell you. If ever I do, you will know something about me which at the present moment I hardly know myself.”

When they reached Lichtenbourg it was latish. She was tired, and dined in her room. Grenville said to himself, amongst the clatter of plates in the restaurant, “It seems as if a brook had been rippling at my side all day, and the god Pan or somebody had filled all the reeds with music.” As for the clatter of the plates and the music of the band outside, loud as they both were, he was hardly conscious of either.

She, for her part, was indeed thoroughly tired. Before she went to bed, her glance fell on her diary. She laid her hand on it, and pushed it away wearily ; but then with

a change of purpose she opened it, seized a pen, and hastily wrote on the page the following verse from Tennyson, with blots above and below it, meant to do duty for asterisks—

“Across the hills and far away,
Beyond their utmost purple rim,
And deep into the dying day,
The happy princess followed him.”

CHAPTER XV.

THEY had made no plans for the following day, but he took it for granted that he should spend it with her somewhere and somehow ; and he was pleased rather than surprised when, before ten o'clock, a note was brought to him from her, begging him to come to her instantly. Surprise, however, came as soon as he found himself in her presence ; for her face and manner were full of trouble and agitation. " I have just," she said, " heard such awful news ; and I can't at all tell what's the best thing to be done. The doctor has just told me that scarlatina has broken out in Lichtenbourg—that three children have already died of it, and that there are two bad cases in the villa next the hotel. I

want," she went on, "to be off without a moment's unnecessary delay; but I am so perplexed—I can't decide where to go. I might return to my aunt; but the children are never well at the castle: and of course we have our flat at Vienna; but Vienna, in this heat, would be death to them. Poor little things—they are both of them so delicate! And then," she added with a faint, regretful laugh, "everything here was beginning to be so pleasant. Do help me—tell me what you advise."

Grenville's face, whilst she was speaking, had shown as much concern as her own; but by the time she had ended, its expression had changed suddenly, and he looked at her for a moment in silence, with a dawning smile.

"Can't you help me?" she said, a little irritably. "To me this is really serious. I, whatever you may do, see in it nothing to smile at."

"I was smiling," he said, "at something you don't see; and that is a way, and an easy one, out of all your difficulties. Take

your children to the Count's hotel in the forest."

The suggestion came to her like a burst of sunshine out of clouds. She drew her breath and clasped her hands with delight at it. But then, relapsing into despondency, she sighed, "The hotel's not open."

"No," urged Grenville, "but some of the rooms are ready; and we know the cook's there. No doubt they could take you in. If you will let me, I'll order a horse, ride over, and arrange about it; and whilst Fritz goes to the stables I'll see the doctor, whom I know. I'll tell him our plan, and send him back to you, in order that he may give you his opinion on it."

She paused reflecting; then she looked at him inquiringly. "And what would you do?" she said. "Would you stay here? You couldn't—at least I suppose so—come very well to the hotel."

"I," he said, "would go to the Count's hunting-lodge. As I told you the other day, it is already as good as lent to me."

"It's too kind of you," she murmured. "But how bored you would be shut up there!"

"As soon as I am," he answered, "I promise you I will go away. Only tell me—shall I ride over now and arrange things?"

"Yes; do what you can; and I shall be waiting for your report anxiously. Don't be too long—not longer than you can help."

This parting injunction kept softly echoing in his ears, as his horse's hoofs rang on the road of yesterday; and he was back again, his mission accomplished, before she had begun expecting him. The manager, he said, had been charmed at his prompt return, and more charmed still at finding out the reason of it. A suite of rooms with a lovely view of the lake were perfectly ready at this moment for occupation; and though as yet there were only a few servants, there were still sufficient to wait upon one family. As for himself, Grenville had been at the lodge. The forester and his wife had heard from the Count that morning, that the English Excellency was to

occupy it whenever it pleased him ; and " By this time," he said, " they will be airing the sheets and dusting. If we go to-morrow afternoon we shall find everything prepared for us ; and in case at the hotel there should be difficulty the first night about dinner, I have ordered something at six, for ourselves and for the children, at the lodge."

" I see," she said, laughing, " you will have everything your own way ; and as the doctor has been here, and considers your plan excellent, we are all bound to be grateful to you. You must also arrange about the carriages. Our flight will be a regular exodus."

And indeed with the luggage, and the servants, and the children, it appeared so. It was a journey slower than their first, and so far as scenery went, it could not offer them the excitement and charm of novelty ; but they felt in it a novelty of some kind—they hardly could tell what ; and though the place to which it was taking them was still fresh in their memories, the life to which it was taking

them had something in it that was hardly imaginable.

Columbus, when he landed first in the New World, could not have felt the thrill of entire strangeness more keenly than they did, when they finally reached their destination. The halt of the three carriages at the wooden porch of the hotel, the bustle of the servants, the sorting of the luggage, the taking of hers indoors, and the despatch of his to the lodge, were for them like events that never had had a parallel. They inspected her rooms together, and admired their fresh daintiness; they went out on the balcony, and admired the lake and forest. The children were wild with delight, as if they had never before been happy; and the mother clapped her hands and laughed as happily as the children.

Presently Grenville hurried off to the lodge, promising to return and bring them over to dinner. The gold of the warm evening was floating on the lake and melting in it, when he did so an hour later, and they went with him across the grass and the pine-needles—a

bright exotic group; for the children wore their red frocks, and their mother, who apologized for her appearance, was glittering in the cloak which had startled his eyes at Lichtenbourg. The meal which they found awaiting them was a supper rather than dinner. There was fish from the lake, a chicken, and a variety of early vegetables. There was for the elders a slim bottle of hock, and an old German jug full of milk for the children. The mellow daylight was still bright enough for them to eat by; but some candles were burning, whose flames were like pale daffodils.

“When we were little,” Mrs. Schilizzi said, “we had a game which we called ‘pretending.’ One could play it in many ways; but our favourite way was this. We put a tent we had on the back of an old donkey, and we walked away to a common behind the house. We pitched our tent, we encamped amongst the furze-bushes, we lit a fire, and pretended we were Arabs in the desert. Those encampments have always seemed to me the remotest

places in the world, and the hours we spent there the most adventurous life imaginable. I feel somehow as if we were playing at 'pretending' now." She said this when the meal was drawing to a close; and then she added presently, laughing into her children's eyes, "Now, children, there is another adventure in store for you. You must come back with mother a long, long way to bed, all across the grass and through the myrtle-bushes where the beautiful fairies play."

The children opened their eyes, and they were deep with the joys of imagination.

"Must we go yet?" said Grenville.
"Won't you wait for our coffee?"

"No," she answered, laying her hand on his arm. "They are tired; it is very late for them. Get them their hats, and let us go. We will come back for our coffee."

As they went, in the dusk, the children played amongst the bushes, constantly running up to their elders to ask where were the fairies; and Mrs. Schilizzi said, "Whenever a

child sees them, they become shy and change themselves into glow-worms."

She and Grenville, when they went back to the lodge, drank their coffee by the window in almost complete silence. Only now and then one or other of them said a faint commonplace something about the charm of the fading view; and once he rose, and seeing her slightly shiver, folded her cloak a little more closely round her.

"Won't you smoke?" she said presently. "I'm sure you would like to do so."

The floating puffs of his cigarette had an effect which was welcome. They seemed to excuse the silence, though they did succeed in breaking it. At last he asked her what it was she was thinking of. "I was counting the clouds," she replied, "which have still any pink left in them."

After a little while he spoke again. "You and I," he said, "must know each other very well, I think."

She asked why? as if sure of the answer and yet waiting for it.

"Because we can sit like this," he said, "and talk without ever speaking."

For a time she made no response, except a look and a faint smile. But at last she rose from her seat, and said, "It is time to go." He expostulated, telling her it was early; and indeed it was only nine.

"Don't keep me," she said very softly and gently. "Let me go. If you like you can walk back with me."

They were both standing by this time, but both seemed withheld from moving. Suddenly she uttered a word, quite naturally, and as if she hardly knew she was using it; but it went through his whole being as if it had been a spell. It was simply his own name, "Bobby." He said nothing. She continued as if talking to herself rather than to him—"That was the name of my favourite brother, and he is dead. He used to tell me everything; and I was more like a mother than a sister to him." Then clasping her hands, she raised her eyes to Grenville's. "Listen," she said. "Will you listen to me? I want to tell you some-

thing. You have been very good to me. You have taken care of me. I wanted to tell you—”

For a second or two she was motionless. Then with a sudden movement she came up to him, and put her hands on his coat. “Bobby,” she whispered, lingering over the syllables, “I want you to be always good to me—always. Tell me that you will be—not loud—tell it me in my ear.”

A silence followed, and only her eyes spoke. There was trouble in them, like the conflict of two meeting waters. A moment later he had stooped his head to answer her; but the answer, which was tender as a moth’s wing on a flower, had been caught by her, not in her ear, but on her lips. The instant after, she had hidden her face in her hands, and when she removed them, in her eyes were tears and happiness. “I am tired,” she said at last; “I must be going.”

As yet he had not uttered a word; but now, looking half sadly at her, “Irma,” he answered, “I will be to you the best I can be. You

are right. You must go now. Come—I will take you back.”

As they went into the open air, the night was wild with perfume. The forests lay around them—zones of enchanted shadow; the lake, glimmering like dim steel, was an enchanted water; but in Grenville's mind, as he returned, was a sense of sorrow and anxiety, bewildering and troubling, although it could not lessen a longing for the to-morrow which lay beyond the night.

As for her, however events might have tired her, they had at any rate not made her sleepy. A lamp stood on the table; her window was half open; a faint sound as of murmuring boughs came in through it; and before her, according to her custom, was the case that contained her diary. The last words she had written were the lines she took from Tennyson. Unity of style as a diarist was not her strong point, certainly; nor did what she wrote now show any concern to make it so. It was hardly like a diary at all, indeed, except that it was prefaced by a date.

"To-night," she began, "if I am to make any true record, I must make it in a new way. I must address myself, not to myself as if I were my own reader, but to something that is outside me, and beyond me. I cannot tell what it is, or at all events I will not define it. I shall let its form and nature remain vague ; and I shall be able, by doing so, to speak to it more freely.

"Listen then, you, whatever you are, before whom I am going to lay my thoughts naked, as the sea lays bare to the moon its hushed and yet troubled waves. Let me feel my way by telling you one little trifle about my childhood. When I was a child, I used to read Ovid's *Metamorphoses* ; and I often amused myself by speculating how the people felt when they found themselves changing into trees and flowers and fountains. I think I know now ; for I am undergoing the same sort of change myself.

"Power to whom I speak, into what am I changing ? You will be able to see perhaps ; but I want myself to tell you. If I could

laugh about it—and I don't see why I shouldn't, for one can always afford to laugh when quite sure that one is serious—I would tell you that I felt like Aaron's rod when it budded. As for Ovid, to go back to him, the bodies of his women turned into flowers. I feel like a flower turning into a woman's soul.

“How vague this seems—don't you think so? Tell me—do you catch my meaning? What I want to do, is to put it more plainly; but when I try to do so in my mind, do you know what happens? The sentences I shape to myself become metamorphosed like Ovid's heroines; and instead of speaking about myself, I find myself speaking about—what? About the warm silence of the night; about the stealing scents of the forest, that just make the edge of the thin lace curtains tremble; about the lapping of the lake that I can just hear at intervals, as at intervals when one is awake in the darkness one can just hear one's watch tick. Yes, I feel inclined to speak to you about all these things, instead of speaking to you—of confessing to you, about

myself. But if I were really talking to you, and you could hear me, you who have so much experience, whilst I have so little, would be sure to read the whole of my confession in my voice.

“And now you must consider again. Is this a sign of anything—this, which I am about to tell you? I write these sentences slowly, pausing between each and dreaming—dreaming as I watch the flames of the candles tremble, and little white drops of wax chase one another down the sides; and as I dream with my pen balanced in my hand, fragments of poetry I have read, and had long forgotten—fragments of all kinds—come like bees in summer, winging their way into my mind; and each comes laden with some meaning which it never had before, and which is all my own—some pollen, some honey, some dew, out of life as I have myself lived it.

“Can you imagine how a rose feels when all its petals are unfolding? This is how I feel. I am unfolding towards you. Power to whom I speak, do you see what you have

done for me? Oh, but you must not boast till you have heard the rest of the story; for if you have done this for me, there is something I have done for you. You must let some boasting be mine, for it is a pleasure I have never had before. I have done this. You, you who are so much stronger than I am—I have led you, I have influenced you. Can I go on? It is more difficult to do so than a moment ago I thought it would be.

“If you could ever see what I am writing, I wouldn’t write another word—I mean about this point. But you never will see it, so I will be intrepid and go on. There has been something in you—and I know what it was; it was regard for me, for I saw that in your eyes, and felt it in your whole demeanour—there has been something in you which has held you back from me, or held you up from me; and because of this I valued you all the more. But I have made you stoop; my power has been greater than yours. I have made you stoop till your lips have at last touched mine; and your touch is upon them still, like

—what odd fancies come to me !—like the taste of manna, which means ‘ what is it ? ’ And do you know how I did this ?—how I drew you to me so near, so near ? I begged you—not in so many words, but you knew my meaning perfectly—I begged you, I prayed you, to keep away from me. And I meant it too, for I have never, never lied to you. But there was something in me at the same time that must have meant something quite different, and meant it more strongly. At least I suppose that was the case ; for now we see the result. Isn’t that so ? Perhaps I shall teach you what a strange thing a woman’s heart is. It’s motto I think ought to be, ‘ I am nothing if logical.’

“ And yet, seeing that in all this some responsibility—perhaps a very grave one—has been incurred somewhere, I don’t mean to let you off, and say you are responsible for nothing. For do you know what you have done ? I wonder—I wonder if you do. I hope you do—but I will tell you. You have entered my mind ; you have moved amongst my thoughts,

like a wind moving through a garden and stealing into the flowers, and fluttering their petals. You have been where no human being has ever been before, not even I myself, and you have said to me, 'See these flower-beds, see these flowers—you never knew, did you, that you had such things in your garden?' Why did you do this? You had no business to come there and wander there at all. But since you have come, do you know how I am going to punish you? I am going to keep you there. You never shall go away again.

"I began talking of you vaguely, as some impersonal power, and owing to a kind of shyness I thought of you vaguely; but by this time I have, I expect, pretty well betrayed myself. And yet I can no more tell you now, than I could at the beginning, all that I want to tell you. Let the air of the night, which we both are breathing, breathe it to you; let the forest murmur it. Let the lake, which is so near you, ripple it to you through your windows. Let me tell it to you myself, in telling

you how I love my children. I feel sometimes as if nothing I could do for them could ever satisfy what I feel for them; that they could never be close enough to my heart; that my life could never completely enough be spent for theirs. As the arms of a mother long to enfold her child, so, my companion, my friend—what am I going to say?—I—I long to enfold you!”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE following morning when she stepped out on her balcony, whilst a waiter inside was clattering with the white breakfast-cups, she murmured, feeling the freshness that seemed to pervade everything, "And the evening and the morning were the first day."

She presently looked towards the lodge, watching the ground in front of it, but she saw no one stirring; and a shadow—a very transparent shadow—of disappointment crossed her mind. "Does he like me?" she said to herself as she passed indoors. But the smile on her lips showed that she had little doubt about the answer.

At breakfast a packet was brought to her.

"What!" she exclaimed. "The post! I

never thought that letters would follow me here so soon." But she saw the next moment that it was something that had come by hand; and she found, on undoing it, that it was a copy of Grenville's poems. She recollected now that she had asked him if he had a copy which he could lend her. He had said, "No"; but a line which he now enclosed ran thus — "By accident this was found in one of my boxes. I will come to you after breakfast. You have made me once more a poet." She turned over the pages with a placid, half-tender interest; but all of a sudden she started and blushed crimson. She had come to the fly-leaf; and that showed her his meaning, when he spoke of once more being a poet. Her initials were written on it, and under her initials these lines:—

"What may I write that shall hint of my love for you?

My pen trembles idly, and doubts as it dips.

Teach me some name that is tender enough for you:

Or else hold me silent, my love, with your lips."

Mrs. Schilizzi remained for some time with the book lying open in her lap, and her eyes

fixed on the verses as if they were some strange flower. She had left the breakfast-table, and was sitting outside in the balcony, shielding her head from the sun with a large parasol, whilst a light breeze played with the soft tendrils of her hair. Her parasol and her dress were red; and as Grenville came presently over to the hotel from the hunting-lodge, he saw her from far off, like one brilliant patch of colour. She however did not see him till he came to her through the window of the sitting-room, and the sound of his steps roused her. She gave him no good-morning, except with her eyes. She looked up at him, her hand still resting on the book, and she merely said, "How could you?"

He returned her gaze, not with sadness exactly, but with gravity; and for a few moments both were silent. At last he said, "Are you angry with what I wrote? It was written before I knew what I was doing."

"No," she said, "not with it, but with myself for being made so happy by it."

There was a long silence, which for some

reason had in it no embarrassment, as was shown by their manner when again they began speaking.

"What shall we do?" he said presently. "The manager tells me that he has a pony-carriage, and also that there are roads in the forest, a little rough, but still fit for driving."

"Oh," she exclaimed, "let us drive!" and her face was like a sunlit sea, from which the shadow of a summer cloud had floated.

The carriage was ordered, and they drove off together, first for a short way skirting the borders of the lake, and then following the road into the heart of the shade and leafage. The wheels waded in cart-ruts, and delightful grasses. Active glancing lights were playing on all sides amongst the branches; birds sang, squirrels whisked their tails, and the white throat of a stoat confronted them, who was tame with wonder. Mrs. Schilizzi seemed to Grenville, as she sat by him, to have the same relation to nature that an echo bears to a voice, and she filled his mental ear with a happy

magical music. Every appreciation he shared with her, every passing laugh, was a new link uniting them, that was fashioned and fastened noiselessly.

Having driven for some way amongst pines, they at last reached a wood of beeches, where the undergrowth was cut into glades, evidently for the purposes of sport, and where the open ground was gleaming with moss and grasses. They left the pony in charge of a boy they had taken with them, and wandered away together through one of these inviting ways. By and by they seated themselves at the foot of a tree, she more flower-like than ever, in her red dress amongst the greenness.

"Never," wrote Grenville afterwards, addressing her in imagination, "never shall I forget that scene, and the strange manner in which our acquaintance ripened. After we had sat there for a minute or two, talking of I cannot remember what, you turned to me with a half-mischievous laugh playing in your eyes and mouth, and yet with something in your manner that was serious, and you said to me,

'Bobby'—you said these two syllables lingeringly and softly, as if you liked the sound, and as if uttering them helped you to think—'I should,' you said, 'think you were a brother, if it were not for one thing. Do you know what that thing is? It is that I want to ask you one question—such a vain one. Do you think I am pretty? I don't believe you do.' Irma, when you asked me that, you were so simple in your very self-consciousness, your curiosity was awake so openly, that you made me absolutely simple in my answer. 'If you were anybody but yourself, I should think you *very* pretty, most likely. As it is, I see not your face, but the meaning of it.' And yet you were pretty, and I said you were. Round your red skirts, through the mosses, blue flowers, whose name I do not know, were pushing themselves like tiny spires; and above you ovals of green sunlight were swinging themselves on the diaphanous films of the beech-tree's young leaves; and we had for companions the hush and whisper of the forest, and the profound embowered solitude.

"Irma, you turned over in your mind what I said to you, as if you were a girl—a little bit of a girl—sucking a sugar-plum, and wondering how you liked it; and at last I saw that you were pleased, and you said, 'I am glad of that. I hate people who like me merely because I'm pretty.'

"We were both satisfied; and for a time we did nothing but pick up grasses and flowers, and ask each other if we knew their names. We were neither of us very good at botany. Suddenly, with an inconsequence that delighted me, you began to tell me of a place in a wood near your old home, where you used to go and hide yourself, taking your books with you. There was a copy of Keats—you were very fond of that; and also an *As You Like It*; and on one of them—I forget which—you had managed to spill some milk; and your brothers and sisters used to say of you, 'Irma always is so messy.' And you laughed as you told me this, and said, 'I am very clean now.'

"Ah, Irma, and then you began telling me one little anecdote after another about your

early years. I should wrong them by writing them down ; they would die on paper. But the effect they produced on me still lives in my mind. They made all the atmosphere of your life's spring breathe about me. How you touched me, my little child, Irma ! You seemed to be bringing out all your toys and treasures, and showing them to me one by one, with a child's simplicity mixed with a woman's humour ; and with a something more than this—with a knowledge that to me you would never have thought of showing them, if you had not been confident that whatever was yours would interest me. There lay the magic of the moment, and its subtle spiritual alchemy, transmuting so much within me.

“What trifles such things are ! Anybody who is not a fool is able, in some moods, to laugh at them : a fool is able to laugh at them in all moods indiscriminately. But nobody except a fool will be frightened by his own laughter. Men who know life best and whose sense of humour is keenest, best know that we never should value anything, if we valued

only what we could never despise or laugh at. In fact what are commonly called the serious interests of life are valuable solely for the sake of what are commonly called its trifles. Let me think of ourselves in the wood, and that idle childish talk of ours, and compare ourselves—well, with me securing their money for the Egyptian bond-holders, or some man in the city who in a morning has made fifty thousand pounds. There, in that last case at all events, we have sense, we have seriousness, with a vengeance. Well—this city man—what does he do with his money? He buys—this is no uncommon thing—he buys for his wife, whom he probably calls his lady, a magnificent tiara of diamonds. But what are diamonds? Nothing but bright pebbles. The final end, then, of this serious thing—business—is to look at or exhibit some little pebbles twinkling. What is that compared with my vision of you?

“We most of us know, or have imagined, what intimate conversations are—conversations which open, and also bind, soul to soul. But few people could suspect that the most intimate

conversation of all, is conversation full of such infantine confidences as yours. Every word was a caress, the more tender and pathetic because unconscious. Well—after you had talked to me about these enchanted trifles, you suddenly checked yourself, and you said to me, ‘Look here—I am doing all the talking. It’s your turn now; you must tell things to me.’ I asked you what sort of things? You reflected a little; and then, Irma, then—looking at me with a persuasive gravity, you said, ‘Tell me why Italy seemed a prosaic place to you.’ I hesitated for reasons which by this time you entirely appreciate. They concerned another woman; and the devotion and respect I felt for you, and my sense of how impossible it would be for me to discuss you with any one else, gave me the same reverential feeling with regard to the woman I speak of. There seemed to be something wanting to justify me in even naming her. And yet I spoke the truth when I answered you, ‘I should like to tell you, but it would take a long time.’ And here, having mentioned time, I found an escape out of my

difficulty. I pulled out my watch, and showed you how late it was. You started and laughed. 'Help me up,' you said ; and as quick as our feet could carry us, we went to the pony-carriage, and returned. I lunched with you at the hotel. How well I remember the look of that meal—the brown crumpled skin of the children's rice-pudding, and the clear blue shadows the dishes made on the table-cloth ! I remember, too, saying, as we entered the room together, 'So far as liking goes, I should like to tell you everything.'

"That evening, Irma, that evening I did so—that evening, full of fate for us.

"In the afternoon you had letters to write ; so had I. You wrote yours in a summer-house by the lake, with your children playing round you. I went to write mine in my own rooms. But write I could not. I could not concentrate my thoughts on the people I wanted to address, or the subjects I wanted to deal with. Between me and the paper your image would come ; and five minutes after five minutes I found myself sitting motionless,

occupied with it only. At last I gave the attempt up, and pushed my pen away from me. I longed to go back to you; but I thought it the kindest thing to give you one hour to yourself at all events; so I kept away from you for all that weary time. I never knew before how long an hour could be, or how in an hour a sense of want could be developed in one, springing up like the tree that grows under the napkin of an Indian juggler. At the end of that hour I went to you, and found you still in the summer-house. 'Have you written your letters?' I asked. You pointed to two sheets of note-paper, on each of which were scribbled a few lines, and which you began listlessly to put into their envelopes. 'I couldn't write,' you said. 'That is all I have done.' Irma, that pleased me. We had been going through the same experience.

"But then suddenly, to my intense surprise, I was annoyed with you. You said you were tired, and wanted to lie down in your own room. What was more natural? And yet—how to explain it I don't know—one of those

wayward caprices of temper, which sometimes take the bit of reason in their mouths, and carry off the imagination on their backs, made me say to myself, you were tired because you were tired of me. 'Must you go?' I exclaimed, as if this petty parting were a tragedy. I felt I would have done anything to keep you. I had brought those verses with me which I had written about your child. I pulled them out, and asked you to let me read them; but instead of doing that, you made me give them up to you. 'How pretty they look!' you said; 'I will take them and read them by myself.' That annoyed me still more. Perhaps my poet's vanity was wounded, though I don't think so. Well, you went; and for an hour I was left alone. Fool that I was—what folly could have possessed me? I actually felt deserted, despised, miserable. Could you believe it? I went roaming about, treading as if I could tread time under my feet, still half angry with you, and yet longing, longing, longing for you as if we had been separated for weeks.

"The hour went by, and still you did not come. You had told me that, when you were rested, you would come out on the balcony. 'Come, come, come,' I said, 'and I will tell you everything. About Italy—and what kept me there—come, and I will tell you all. Every thought in my mind is longing to pour itself into yours.'

"Suddenly it occurred to me that the old man at the lodge had shown me a boat-house with some boats belonging to the Count in it. An idea came to me. We would dine at the lodge at six, and I would row you on the lake afterwards. This gave me at once an excuse for sending up a note to you. I longed to be in communication with you, even through a sheet of note-paper. I turned towards the hotel, for at the time I was looking away from it, and there, Irma, I saw you sitting in the balcony. You waved your hand. I went; I believe I ran towards you. I was up-stairs, I was by your side in a moment; and your smile showed me how foolish my bitter dreams had been, and that whatever had tired you,

you were not tired of me. I told you of my plan for our dinner, and our boating. You assented with pleasure ; and then you said, softly and musically, as if you hardly knew you were saying it, as if it were a thought that had become embodied accidentally, 'Do you care for me? I thought just now that perhaps you were only amusing yourself.' 'I will tell you,' I said, 'on the lake what will make you think otherwise.'

"And then, these little things happened. You said, 'I have not been sleeping, I have been reading your verses. After I had read them, I could not close my eyes.' Presently, too, you told me this—that you had been writing your diary in a new way, as if you were talking to me. 'Of course,' you said, 'I shall not show it to you ; but it helps me to fancy you are listening.' I told you that for the future I would do the same. 'If you care for it,' I said, 'I will leave it you, and you shall read it when I die.' This accounts for the form in which I am writing my diary now.

“We dined at the lodge—you and I and the children; and afterwards you and I went floating out over the water. ‘Well,’ you said presently, ‘what are you going to tell me?’ I said I was going to answer you the question you had asked me about Italy. I said, too, that you must be patient, and let me answer you in my own way. I began my story like this, as no doubt you remember. ‘Since the days when you did your geography lessons out of a school-book, I dare say you have forgotten the very name of the city of Vicenza. It is little talked about; few tourists visit it; and yet, in all northern Italy, there are few places more interesting. Its narrow streets, blinded with Venetian shutters, are full of old palaces, having carved and pillared fronts, and great arches under whose shadow you enter, passing through them into stately courts. There are pale marble staircases, hushed and mysterious, leading to saloons and halls, whose ceilings are dim with paintings, whose great hearths are overhung with carvings and coats-of-arms,


and whose walls are darkened with old tortoiseshell cabinets. Down on the streets look rows of antique balconies, whose iron railings are twisted into leaves and lyres. There is a theatre built more than three hundred years ago, which still has on its stage some of its original scenery. Lamps at night twinkle before the images of saints. There are churches everywhere, full of twilight and gilding; and stray scents of incense meet you as you come round corners. You would think it the very place to dream in. Well—it was to Vicenza I went; and shall I tell you why I went there? It was to meet somebody to whom——’ Irma, when I said this you started, and exclaimed in a breathless whisper, ‘Somebody whom you are going to marry?’ I said, ‘If you had asked me that question three weeks ago, I should have answered Yes! Wait a moment, and you will see how I answer it now.’ Irma, what a true woman you are!—I can’t help laughing as I think of what you did then. Do you remember how you leaned forward, and

exclaimed, 'Tell me her name! I'm sure she is beautiful—and yet, no—I'm quite sure she was horrid!' I smiled even then, at that. I told you who she was; and you said that she was very grand, and that she was this, and that, and the other, and that I had better go and marry her; and then you said, 'Well—go on. How did you fall in love with her?' I told you—I described her—her looks and character, even how she did her hair, and how she dressed; and you were delighted—Irma, you know you were—when you found out that her boots were not very well made. I described the feeling which, when I first met you, I had for her, and the mood of mind in which I went to meet her at Vicenza. Then I described our meeting there. I described her pleasure at meeting me—so placid and yet so frank, and the kind of pleasure I felt in response to it; and then I went on in this way. 'All that was good and genuine and intelligent in her, I recognized as clearly as ever, and also the quiet high-breeding that betrayed itself—or should

I say hid itself?—in every movement and gesture, and in every intonation of her voice. But, for some reason—I could not divine what—she seemed changed; she seemed faded; something seemed to have passed away from her; and I began to wonder what had been my condition of mind, when a girl like this could have tinged all my dreams with rose-colour. In due time we began—the whole party of us—to explore the town. She and I were constantly apart from the others. It seemed tacitly arranged that this should be so; and I tried to point out to her all the many things that touched my own imagination, and perfumed the very air with interest. One thing I soon found out. So far as mere facts went, she knew a great deal more about Vicenza than I did; and small wonder indeed, for, as it appeared presently, she had just been learning by heart the contents of two guide-books. But as to the sentiment of the place, as to that strange, plaintive music that old things make in ears able to hear it—of this she knew nothing.

For instance, those old iron balconies I told you of—I, each time I looked at them, thought of the women's forms that long ago had leaned on them palpitating, and of their expectant eyes. But my friend's mind was occupied with the fact that the two best specimens were to be found in a certain street, and that the date of them was 1500. I had been to Vicenza once before, alone. I had found it fascinating then; but now, as I went through it with her, the town seemed changed, just as she seemed changed herself. Both somehow were disenchanted. Do you know how, after two days' sight-seeing, she summed up her impressions? She said that Vicenza was very quaint and interesting, but it would be a dull little place to live in. The last statement was no doubt absolutely true; but it affected me, when she made it, exactly as I should have been affected if, after having witnessed some wonderful religious ceremony, she had nothing to say about it except that the church was draughty. Well—now let me tell you this: I am coming to the end of

my story. All the time that I was there going about with her, memories kept echoing in my mind of another relic of the past—an old castle in a forest on the borders of Hungary, where iron balconies overhung a forest of beech-trees, and where I stood with some one who was looking for something that never came. That day I seemed to have lived to music; and I felt that now by contrast I first knew its full charm. That day was summer; these were frost. That day I was at home. During these days I was an exile. I was home-sick, Irma, for our golden holiday. I didn't understand my feelings clearly then. I have learnt to do so since. I never said then to myself that the want in my life was you; but I began to find out, and to feel a relief in finding, that cordial as my friend was, there was nothing whatever in her manner which need mean necessarily anything more than cordiality. She was often conscious of not quite understanding me. I could see this; and I could see something besides—that she found in the



fact very little to discompose her; indeed, in a kindly and cheerful way she was amused by it. When I tell you that, how little I seem to be saying! In reality, I am saying so much. The result was this—I grew certain of two things: first, that although I might, if I made an effort, secure her affection easily, yet if I did not make that effort, she would not be much of a sufferer; secondly, that the effort was one which I had no heart to make. Affairs being in this position, fate did me a kind turn. It visited an aunt of my friend's with a bad attack of bronchitis. This lady, who was passing the spring in Florence, was lonely and nervous, and telegraphed to her relatives at Vicenza, the consequence being that they went to her, at a moment's notice. I went to the station with them—I said good-bye to my friend. We were cordial—nothing more. The train steamed off, and I was left alone on the platform, filled with a feeling of relief, and yet of blankness also; for it seemed that my future, which had lately showed a definite

prospect, had all of a sudden melted into stormy clouds.' Just as I was saying this, Irma, you gave an exclamation. Some large rain-drops had fallen, and turning your face to the sky, you said, 'We are going, I think, to have stormy clouds now.' We looked about us. The sky had become purple; the stars were steadfast above us, and were wavering below us in the faint depths of the lake; but up from the west was floating a film of dusky vapour. Some more drops fell. We were not far from land, and we were both on shore before the real downpour had begun. We hastened into the lodge, where my room was already lamp-lit. We sat down. For a short time we were silent, and I was doubtful how to take up the broken thread of my history. By accident your eyes fell on a photograph lying upon my writing-table. It was a photograph of an old house. You took it up, and first because you felt it a relief to speak about an indifferent subject, and then because you saw how beautiful the house was, you broke out into expressions of admiration.

You asked, 'Whose is it?' I said, 'It is mine—at least at present. But soon I am going to sell it.' You asked why, and I told you to get money. 'What!' you exclaimed, 'your old family home! If I had a place like that, I would sooner sell my life.' In your voice, when you said that, there was something like contempt. I had not intended to tell you what the next moment I did tell you. 'It is my life,' I said; 'but I am going to sell it for the sake of another life.' Then I explained everything to you. I explained how all my future, so far as my fortune went, depended on my projected marriage; and how I found now this marriage to be impossible—impossible for one reason, which was you. You looked at me as if you could hardly believe your ears, and you drew a long breath, the sound of which I can hear now. You were sitting on a sofa. 'Bobby,' you said, and you could hardly speak for emotion, 'is this true? Are you really not going to marry her? And am I alone in the world no longer?' And then

you said, 'And you have really not been playing with me? Come to me here, and tell me so.'

"Do you remember how on one occasion we talked about certain French novelists, and how we condemned parts of their writings? If one of these writers had taken up the thread of our history, his pages would probably be open to every condemnation we could pass upon them. But I will tell you why. What he would remember would be what we forget. What we remember, he would neither understand nor dream of.

"Irma, Irma, when two lives are united, it is a serious thing. Some changes in life are as unexpected as sudden death—and as great. Irma, we know both these truths. I took you back to your hotel when the rain had ended, and I said to you—do you remember what I said?—'There may be sorrow between us, but now there is no division.'"

CHAPTER XVII.

IN the gray of the morning Grenville woke, with a dull sense weighing on him that a vague something had happened, which he shrank from looking at, and when looked at would change him in his own eyes.

A man's life may be judged by two standards—some ideal standard of saintly or ascetic perfection, and the ordinary standard of the world. With regard to that class of conduct to which all men apply, and men who are mad confine, the term morality, he had not been immaculate if tried by the first standard; but self-restrained, healthy, and honourable, if tried by the other. He had never so lived as to lose that mental quality which is in the inner world the equivalent of a clear atmosphere; on which,

apart from any ideas of Puritanism, so much that is valuable in the human character depends ; and which every one of sound judgment praises under the name of purity. However he might have acted on this or that occasion, his acts had never committed him to any course of life which the timidest conscience, in its most conventional mood, would look on as indefensible, or even needing defence. He had never made love, in any serious way, to any woman who might not have become his wife ; and rarely without a thought that perhaps she would become so actually.

His present position was therefore wholly new to him. As occupied by others it was of course familiar enough. It was the position of men and women he was intimate with in his daily life — men and women of whom, whatever their fault in this respect — many seemed otherwise better, not worse than their more regular neighbours. But as occupied by himself, it was strange, unknown, untried ; and he learnt, what surprises everybody who lives to learn it, that the constant sight of a

burden borne by others, tells us little of what it will feel like when we come to bear it ourselves. Hitherto, as regarded the others, his mental attitude had been this. He had prided himself, not on condemning them, but on being different from them, and in this respect above them; and frequently though almost unconsciously comparing his own character with theirs, the comparison always flattered him by showing his own to advantage. And now he felt that at last he had joined the band from which, with secret pride, he so long had held aloof; whilst voices, half mocking, seemed to whisper about his bed, "Welcome, welcome. Now you are one of us." Half awake as he was, he was at the mercy of all those spectres—grotesque, obscure, monstrous—which beset the ante-chamber of the conscience, begging to be employed by it, and pretending to be employed by it, eager to bring to the soul madness, not sane self-judgment, and with which a sane conscience will have nothing at all to do. This flock of grimacing presences, whilst he lay drowsy, filled him with horror of

himself; and then his thoughts in a moment turned to the situation of another, and he wondered whether she was overtaken by the same humiliation and torture. This poignant consideration stung him into complete wakefulness. He roused himself; he sat up; he stared round him, with heavy-lidded eyes. He felt as if he had done her a wrong. He wondered if she were reproaching and scorning him. He wondered, with even more anxiety, how she would bear her own scorn of herself. The doors of his conscience opened, and her phantom came forth to meet him.

He moved to get up, but felt like a man on a steamer, who is so sea-sick that he dares not quit his berth. To get up would be to face realities: he had not the heart to do so. He did so at last, however; his will rallied its strength. He hastily put some clothes on, muffling himself in his great-coat. He softly unlocked the door, and he went out. The sky was a field of dim moving fleeces, damp as Gideon's, and so was the lake as well. All the ground was spongy and gray

with dew. Nothing about him stirred but a slow and silent breeze, which just laid on his cheeks the touch of the weeping air. He looked blankly round him. In spite of its strange aspect everything spoke of her. He thought of their drive of yesterday, and the meeting of their sympathies in the sunshine; and then he started as his eyes rested on the hotel. Had it not been for that, yesterday might have been years ago; but that was a witness of her actual neighbourhood, as it slept with its closed white curtains, and its wet tiles glimmering. His eyelids were heavy still; his head ached. How, he asked himself, would she meet him? Or would she meet him at all? Perhaps, he thought, she would merely send him a letter, telling him coldly never again to see her; or perhaps, so some fancy whispered, she would be dead. He looked at his watch. It was only five o'clock. Hours must pass before he could have any news of her. He longed to throw himself at her feet, crying, "Forgive, forgive me!" Then again another thought tormented

him. "Perhaps she will be saying to herself that I despise her."

Close to the lodge was a little patch of garden. There were some white roses in it, and some red tulips. He picked a bunch of these, and arranging them very carefully, went indoors, and put them in a tumbler of water. The cold air was now making him sleepy. He sought his bed again, and slept till Fritz awoke him. He made Fritz tie the flowers together, and told him to take them at once to Mrs. Schilizzi, and ask if she had caught cold owing to last night's rain. "If she wishes not to see me," he thought, "she will send back word to say so. I shall escape the humiliation of finding her door closed." He waited miserably impatient for the return of Fritz. He waited for half an hour. At last a message came to say that she was quite well, and would hope to see him soon after ten o'clock. Along with the message came a small scrap of paper, with this scrawled on it—"How good of you! what lovely flowers!"

The words operated like a charm on him. A load fell from his heart. He realized that his coffee was at his bedside. He drank it, and rose instantly. He dressed with a hurried eagerness, and turned his steps to the hotel. As he approached it, his heart again sank, and his hand trembled as he knocked at the door of her sitting-room.

He entered. She was at breakfast with her children, and some of his flowers were in the breast of her red dress. She looked full at him. There was no anger in her face, there was no confusion, and her voice still had its laugh, like the ripple of a brook in spring-time. The only change in her—and indeed there was a change—was the growth in her eyes, and smile of an inquiring pathetic earnestness.

"I see," he said, by way of saying something, "that Fritz has brought you my flowers."

"Yes," she murmured, pointing him to a chair at the table. "I know, too, why you sent them. Sit down and have some coffee with us. Olga, get him a cup."

Grenville declined.

"Won't you?" she said. "You look tired."

"Do I?" he said; "I've been thinking."

"Yes," she replied; "so have I—thinking about many things. Come outside on the balcony. The children can finish by themselves. Tell me," she said, in a whisper, as soon as they were alone together, "you don't hate me, do you? Speak, Bobby, and tell me!"

Grenville looked at her in silence, as if vainly seeking for words. At last he said slowly, "I don't want to use exaggerated language."

She gave a gasp, as if a knife had wounded her. "What!" she exclaimed. "Then you do hate me? Tell me—do you?"

"I don't want," he repeated, "to use exaggerated language; but I believe I am not exaggerating if I tell you that I would willingly die for you."

He was surprised himself at the almost bald intensity which he heard in his own

voice as he quietly said this. The effect on her was like that of the sun reflecting itself in water. The returning smile on her lips, and the trusting affection in her eyes, which, deep as it was, seemed as if yet it were but half unfolded, filled him with something which would have been overwhelming happiness, if he had not, in consequence of his recent trouble and suffering, felt it as rather the blessing of overwhelming peace.

And yet through all this, though he was scarcely conscious of the fact, there was something in her which troubled and perplexed him, and was a riddle—a riddle, however, which she could herself have answered, could she only have confessed herself to him, as she did a few hours later to her diary. For although she had calmed him, yet in a certain way she had shocked him. He feared she would have suffered too much : it seemed as if she had suffered nothing. But she too, like him, had been face to face with self ; and had confronted conscience with a braver face than he had, though naturally she had

expected an even keener wound from it. Her husband's social connections had principally been amongst the severest middle-class, and she had thus seen how the just persons who need no repentance were accustomed to throw stones at women in her present position, as eagerly as little *gamins* in the street throw stones at a cat ; and she had feared that her own conscience might stone her in the same way. This treatment, however, she had not experienced. Her conscience had behaved very differently from his ; and the reason was, not indeed the greater intensity, but the greater simplicity of her own emotion, and a certain moral fortitude greater than his, which it had endowed her with. What she wrote in her diary was as follows—

“Considering what I have to write about, it seems odd that I can take up my pen so calmly. But the oddness is not due to anything that I feel in myself, but to the discrepancy between that and what I ought to feel, according to conventional theory. In

connection with the step I have taken, my own impression of myself is most vivid. One often reads stories of a soul's surprise after death at its own condition, so completely different from what was expected. I am like such a soul. Nothing has happened to me which conventional theory would demand. I have crossed a chasm into which I ought to have fallen, whose depths are said to be full of mire and rocks; but something has borne me up—has carried me through the air—I am neither soiled nor injured.

“If I were I would confess it. When I awoke I thought I must be, and each moment I was afraid I should find myself a spiritual wreck. As a matter of fact, however, to my surprise I found myself sound and whole. Why should I pretend otherwise? I should not mend matters by lying. I will be honest and pretend nothing. I ought to feel degraded—that may be—but I don't. This is the plain truth—I can't say more than that.

“And yet I can—I can say a great deal

more. I have not said half yet. If I fail to feel what the occasion is supposed to demand, it is not from callousness. If I were really degraded, surely—surely I should know the signs of it. I should feel unworthy of doing or thinking anything good; my eyes would flinch from the thought of ideal goodness; and somehow and somewhere I should be hardened. But I am conscious of nothing of this kind. No—no. On the contrary, never has affection, or the sense of goodness and beauty, filled my heart so full as they fill it now. My children to-day are more dear to me than ever. The desire for self-sacrifice, the desire for prayer, trouble me, and are ever in my heart. I am not deceiving myself. I can distinguish good from evil as well as most people; and my good thoughts and my pure thoughts—I know them as my guardian angels. After the step I had taken, I feared they would have deserted me; but I look about me, and they keep me company still—as near me as ever, as much mine as ever. And he is

mine also, and keeps me company along with them."

Such being her condition in her own eyes, what possessed her mind when she met him again that morning, was a sense not of abasement or trouble, but of exaltation—a sense not of a lost but rather of a transfigured universe; and gradually Grenville's spirit adjusted itself under the direction of hers, as though it were stronger than his own, and had mastered life more fully.

"I want you," she said presently, "to be with me all to-day. The children have their lessons to do. Let them come with us into the summer-house, and whilst they work you shall read to me."

He was himself not in a mood for reading; but he felt, for a reason which by and by became more clear to him, that this did but make him happier and more zealous in obeying her. As they returned to the hotel for luncheon, he picked up a broken flint. "Do you think that pretty?" he said. "Don't you? I wish you did."

She asked why.

"Because," he said, "if it would only give you pleasure, I would willingly sit all day long and break stones for you."

Few things are so constantly misinterpreted as the changes of women's moods, by the perverse faculties of men. After luncheon, contrary to what she said in the morning, Mrs. Schilizzi surprised Grenville by begging him to leave her to herself for a little, explaining her words by adding, "till four o'clock." He felt that to do this was a tax on his self-denial not quite so agreeable as that she had lately made on it. But he hid his reluctance, and left her when she wished. Her first step was to write—and she was some time in doing so—the passage in her diary which was just now quoted; and then, not being strong, she lay down to rest, repeating it with closed eyes, and reaffirming its meaning.

He, meanwhile, was undergoing a very different experience. He walked restlessly along the borders of the lake, and, removed from her presence, the charm of which seemed

to protect him, the first bitterness of his waking mood revived in him, and he now found it aggravated by the sense that she did not share it. He hardly dared to scrutinize what was going on within him; he tried to believe it was mere impatience to be with her again. But when the time came to go back to her, something had begun to stir in him which, though he would not recognize it, was like anger against her; and shrinking from this, and indignant at it, he told it to get behind him: but it did not vanish; it dogged him like some cowed figure, and kept him a prey to self-reproach and dejection. He did his utmost to disguise from her the change that had overtaken him; and his voice recovered its tenderness, but he could not recover his spirits. They had arranged to take the children for a walk amongst the shadows of the forest; and he tried to hide his condition in his kindness and his attention to them. For a time this succeeded; but at last the truth was felt by her, his replies when he spoke to her were so short, and his

smiles were so slow in coming. At last she said to him with a certain constrained abruptness—

“I know why you are so moody. You are afraid you have done me an injury, though you might perhaps have thought of it a trifle sooner. But leave that matter to me. We have quite enough each to do to bear our own responsibilities.”

To his morbidly sensitive ear her voice seemed hard and flippant. He hung his head, and walked on in silence.

“Well,” she said presently, “are you not going to speak to me?”

He looked at her, and was wounded afresh by a smile that seemed almost mocking.

“Perhaps,” he said, “if what you tell me is true, I had better go and bear my responsibility in solitude.”

“If you like to,” she answered, “certainly.” He stopped short in his walk, and fixed a long look on her. Then he held out his hand, and quietly said, “Good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” she repeated, and turning

away moved on. He remained where he was, leaning listlessly against a tree. A swarm of torturing thoughts at once sprang at him out of their ambush, accusing with hateful voices the woman from whom he was parting himself.

"You," they said to him, "are by no means her first lover. You are not the first in fact, and you have not even the first place in her fancy."

That these suggestions came to his mind like truths it is too much to say ; but they irritated him like the stings of mosquitoes, with a pain which he despised whilst it maddened him. He looked after her to see if she were out of sight. She was not. She was at some distance, but just as his eyes turned to her, she too, stopping, had turned a glance towards him—a glance which, though still resentful, seemed to be full of melancholy. He hurried towards her, as though she were his life escaping him, which he must return to, though the process were full of pain.

"Irma," he said, "forgive me. My soul will kill itself if I leave you."

They walked on side by side, each of them still troubled. At last she spoke.

"It seemed," she said coldly but yet gently, "that whatever your soul will do, you could leave me very easily. I never," she went on presently, and her voice was a little harder, "I never knew a man take offence so quickly."

They had reached an open spot, where the children were picking blue-bells.

"I am rather tired," she said. "I am going to sit down. May I ask you to be so kind as to spread my cloak on the ground?"

He did so, and sat down by her. Her tone had filled him with fresh bitterness, and inflamed anew the stings of all his recent suspicions. He was afraid to speak for fear of what he should hear himself saying; but at last, slowly and firmly, as if he were addressing a stranger—

"I am sorry," he said, "that my temper is so very unreasonable, and that I show to so little advantage by the side of your former lovers."

She started in horror, and looked at him, as if she could hardly believe her ears.

"How can you," she gasped, "say a thing like that to me!" Her eyes held him motionless. They at once petitioned and judged him. They slowly filled with tears, and he saw that her lips trembled. Instead of reproaching him she helplessly leaned towards him, and resting her arm on his knee, explored his face wistfully. "Bobby," she said, "you shouldn't treat me like that. For your sake I have taken off my armour, and now you are stabbing me, after you have made me defenceless. Tell me—what is it? Why do you think bad things of me?"

He tried to explain. He did so very lamely; but she realized that he was reminding her of something she had said about "other men."

"I'm not perfect," she said, "I know that. I would willingly tell you all there is to tell; but it's not much. I've been interested in other men—yes, I have been interested; but that's all. Do you believe me? You must.

It is the entire truth. I don't quite know," she continued, "what you are thinking about me. I have seen so much less of the world than you. I believe I'm so much simpler."

"Irma," he said, "Irma, are you?"

"I think so. From you, at least, I have nothing I wish to hide; and you are the only person to whom I can say that, or ever could have said it. Once—yes, I must confess this—I thought I could have loved one man; but I didn't; and no man, not even that one, has ever so much as held my hand. Bobby—you must believe me."

Disbelief was impossible. He was conquered: he showed her that he was so. Her voice slowly changed to a happy murmur, which still suggested tears, but tears with a rainbow spanning them.

"I was like a dog," she said, "that had been beaten all its life. I trusted in you; and you—you were more cruel than any one."

The words sounded like a reproach, but really they were the seal of a reconciliation. She seemed to be giving the keys of her heart

into his hands—to be placing herself wholly at his merey. Her soul lay before him as if it were clear water; he was filled by the sense of how wholly her entire being was his; and he felt that their union had been but half complete till now. The wood, which a moment ago had been chilled with gloom and bitterness, was once more full of sunshine and moss-scented air and flowers. This pair, lately so taciturn, sent out their voices to the children; and the laughter of the children, which answered them, was hardly more gay than theirs.

Grenville noticed, as an experience altogether new to him, these sharp and rapid changes from happiness to aggravated misery, and from misery again to happiness. His nature had hitherto been equable under all vicissitudes. He had never suspected it to be capable of being shaken and moved so violently. But happiness, at all events, was what possessed him now; and when it ceased at intervals to sparkle, it did but become peace.

All through dinner that evening enchantment hung in the air. In the warm dusk afterwards the children played amongst the glow-worms; and then, when the nurse came out, calling them and telling them it was bed-time, Grenville and his companion again committed themselves to the boat, and glided off together into the stillness between the sky and water.

The boat was commodious; and when he had rowed some way, he shipped his oars, and silently seated himself beside her. They hardly, for the time, felt any need for talking. Each trusted the other to think and to brood in silence, each knowing that each was being taken into the other's life. All nature conspired to assist the process, isolating them as if they two were the only human beings in the world, and making all ties unimaginable except that which bound them to one another. Over their heads was the veil of the immeasurable twilight. Stars—the immemorial friends of lovers—were showing themselves; a young moon glittered like liquid silver.

All around, the forests, softly dim and mysterious, guarded the lake, as they stood above their own reflections ; and down in the depths below were the horns of the floating crescent.

Every trace of bitterness was gone from his heart ; every wound was healed in hers. " But peace," as he wrote subsequently, " need not mean, and did not mean then, quiescence. An element in my passion," he went on, " which had already made itself felt, but which I had not understood clearly, was now coming to the surface, and growing in power as it did so. This, Irma, was a longing not only to enjoy your society, but to suffer for the sake of enjoying it. I wished to prove in this way, not only to you, but to myself, the truth of my devotion to you. I wished to bear witness to it by some species of martyrdom. I am like David, I would not offer you that which costs me nothing." Of what this feeling meant, and of what it would one day lead to, even yet he was not fully aware ; but the consciousness of it even then gave wings to his passion, and enabled him

to conclude his diary for the day thus—"For the first time in my life I have realized, from my own experience, how matter and spirit are capable of being fused together, how the body can rise with the soul instead of weighing it down, and how instead of dying it can be changed."

Before they returned, he said to her hesitatingly, almost shyly, "There is something I want to tell you. If every husband loved his wife as well as I love you, marriage would indeed be a sacrament, and earth long ago would have been heaven. If love like this is degradation, there is no elevation possible."

"Bobby," she said, "why do you fret yourself? I know that my soul is living—now for the first time. You said you would die for me. My wish is to live for you."

She had arrived at the same self-knowledge as he had; only he had reached it gradually, by a conscious and painful progress, in the teeth of adverse prepossessions, which had to be met and reasoned with. To her, everything, though strange, had been entirely

simple. Thus far she had not reasoned about anything—about sacrifice, or flesh, or spirit. Her thoughts were lost in him ; she had ceased to busy them with herself. She only remembered herself when his words had reminded her of it ; and later on, when again they had found themselves on shore, and when by and by the doors of the hotel received her, she hardly knew that her feet had touched the earth, or that her cheeks were like fluttered rose-petals.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOME women perhaps may not be pleased to hear it, but women influence men not by how they argue, but by what they are—by the effect which their arguing has, not on others, but on themselves. And Mrs. Schilizzi in this way affected Grenville more than volumes of philosophy could have done, written in defence of his position. The serenity of her self-confidence communicated itself to him, and became for the time being the moral foundation of his life. She was his support, and he rested on her.

Days and evenings now passed on without their counting them, varying little in respect of outer incidents, but witnessing, so far as their own consciousness was concerned, the formation

of a new world either of reality or illusion. What it was, they had to learn by experience. Its formation was an experience by itself.

From the first moment of his regarding her with any attention, he had not only felt her temperament to be attractive to his own, but he had discovered, under a misleading manner, that her intellect was active, and that her knowledge, though it was scattered, was curiously extensive. He now learnt how her education had been the work solely of herself. No guiding hand had been ever held out to help her. She had been the lonely sower of seed in her own soul; and some of the seeds had sprung up like wild-flowers; others had hardly sprouted; and others, perhaps most, were sleeping. On these his thoughts seemed to descend like rain; and ground that before looked barren, began to grow green with life.

Apart from his personal attachment to her, she was in this way singularly interesting. She had found herself solitary in the wilderness of possible knowledge, with nothing to guide her choice of what she would try to

know, except the needs of her own nature, so far as she was able to understand it. Whatever, therefore, she had tried to learn, she had tried to learn not because it was considered by others as an article essential to a decorously upholstered mind, but solely because a conscious want told her it would be of interest to herself. Thus, whether it bore immediate fruits or not, what she learnt passed at once into her life, and became part of her being.

Her knowledge in consequence was certainly the strangest medley ; and the books she had attacked, not only modern but ancient, at first made Grenville smile at her naïve temerity. But presently he admired her for the unexpected degree to which she had mastered them. In many cases, without any philosophical training, she had gone straight to a point which students seized only after painful labour ; and although as to much her judgments and her knowledge were childish, she had one gift at all events which philosophers may envy children. She had the vividness, the early freshness of vision, which belongs to

those who make their own discoveries, and see things for the first time. She viewed the knowledge as Columbus viewed America.

Grenville in talking to her felt as if he were being born again, and were half recovering through her this long-lost, irrecoverable faculty. But for what he received he gave her a full equivalent. Of the services he rendered her, one of the chief was this. She had been shy of accepting and using her own conclusions; he showed her their value; and partly owing to his assistance, partly owing to a development of her own self-confidence, her ideas began to marshal themselves into new order. She had read, for instance, a good deal of German criticisms on the text and history of the Bible, and the origin of Christian doctrines; but she had been totally unaware of the degree of reputation or influence enjoyed by the critics, or how thought in general had been affected by them. All sorts of books on morals she had studied in the same way, assenting or not assenting to the views expressed in them; but whilst clinging to her

own opinion, doubtful of what value to attach to it. Grenville was the first person she had ever met to whom such thoughts and subjects were familiar, or at any rate the first to whom she had ever been able to speak about them ; and gradually through his conversation she realized her intellectual bearings.

This process of education was embroidered on hours that seemed idle. They read their books to the music of the lake or forest ; when they closed the pages, some wild wood-flower would be their marker ; when their attention was tired, the laughter of the children would refresh them. All their speculations about life were but parts of intense living, tinged and vivified by the blood of the coloured moments. Sometimes they would spend an entire morning in fishing, and untangle their views and the children's lines alternately. She would pause in the middle of her philosophy to ask him how he liked her dress ; and she often relieved some mood of prolonged seriousness by surprising him at dinner or luncheon with one he had not seen before.

"I felt," she would say laughing, "that it was quite necessary for me to show it to you; and if it is too smart for a forest, why there's no one but you to see it."

Such little exhibitions of true feminine vanity gave an added charm to her deeper and more spiritual qualities; and her philosophy itself would constantly show its womanhood, when, under the influence of some inward emotion, or some aspect of nature, it would suddenly become silent, and then reappear as poetry. But all their conversation, indeed, even when it seemed to be driest, was permeated by the poetry of life in its subtlest form. Even a discussion of a book such as Mill's *Logic*, about which one day she questioned him with great shrewdness, had the same charm in it by which all their discussions were transfigured. It was a living act of relationship between him and her; a conscious interchange of embracing and interlacing thoughts. And the forests, and the woodflowers, with the sunlight laughing amongst the leaves, and the smell of the bog-myrtle;

and the colours of the silent sunsets, mixed themselves with all these incidents of her intellectual growth, or surrounded them with a garland, until, as she said in her diary with regard to this period, "Every day of my life is like a page out of an illuminated missal."

Such being the character of the lovers, and of the subjects which occupied their attention, it is not to be supposed that, in spite of their happiness, the peculiarity of their situation, with the question of how far it was defensible, did not force itself on their thoughts. It did; but owing to a variety of reasons, their doubts showed themselves only to be set at rest. In the first place, they knew that their mutual attachment in itself deserved none of the opprobrious epithets which conventional respectability would apply to it. To call it shameful, or impure, or degraded, would, they felt, be utterly inappropriate. But however elevated it might be in itself, what was to be said for it if taken in connection with its circumstances? So far as Grenville was concerned, Mrs. Schilizzi, without meaning it,

was constantly answering this question afresh. She often mentioned her husband, showing no shrinking in doing so; and her tone, not resentful, merely apathetic, together with many details which she let fall as to his treatment of her, showed how completely she knew herself to be nothing to him—how little interest in her he had, or even pretended to have. And whatever effect this fact had upon Grenville, its effect upon her was naturally yet more direct. At the same time their singular isolation from the world made many other considerations so dim as to be hardly imaginable; and of the conventional judgments which that remote world might pass upon them, some seemed based on beliefs no longer tenable, and others on a necessary ignorance of their own characters and circumstances. They read their situation only by its own internal light; and the only transgression they could see in it, was one not of depravity, but of daring. They felt like two lonely voyagers striking out a course for themselves, who indeed had lost

their landmarks, but had for their guide a star.

They had no shyness in discussing this conclusion, whenever they were visited at intervals by any misgivings as to its soundness; because their passion, justifying itself by its own intensity, made them feel that such misgivings must be in themselves unsound. But they never neglected them, or pushed them aside contemptuously. As each suggested itself, they examined it and treated it tenderly, like a child who cried in the dark, and had to be soothed to sleep.

On one occasion, for instance, as if trying to alarm her conscience, she had urged that no one could have a right to make a law for himself, or to do what would injure society if everybody followed his example; and he had answered her—

“You forget the most important part of the matter. You forget that what a man does, on any given occasion, is not only that part—that small part—of his act which can be named in a short commandment. His act

includes his entire inward disposition, his circumstances, and those of others connected with him; and the quality of his act depends principally on these. Amplify your supposition thus, and see what then comes of it. If all the unhappy couples in the world were to re-sort themselves to-morrow, and were to follow our example in this fuller and truer sense, by doing as we do, and by being as we are, would the world be happier or unhappier, purer or more impure?"

As for him, his doubts and answers to them were comparatively simple and obvious; and after everything else had been said, the thought that chiefly supported him—as was but natural in the case of a man—was this—

"If I am not injuring her, I am injuring no one. If I am not ruining her life, I am redeeming it."

But on her mind her position had an effect far wider. As she examined herself, she seemed to be examining not her own fate only, but the possible fate of any woman; not herself only, but womanhood; and she

felt herself possessed of a sudden clairvoyance into its claims. About this general aspect of the matter, indeed, she was diffident of speaking to Grenville. She was anxious to show him how honestly she could defend herself; she was too timid to appear as a philosopher on behalf of her sex generally. But she expressed in her diary what she could not confide even to her friend, and often forgot her own case in contemplating that of others.

One evening, for instance, she wrote as follows; and it will serve to show what was taking place in her mind—

“If marriage is a sacrament, as the Roman Church says it is, it is a sacrament I have violated. I have committed a sin:—there is no getting over that. But if this view be true, I have lived in sin always, ever since I was a child, for I have neglected sacraments which are even more important. I have never been to confession; I have never been to mass. But if I am justified in declining to regard myself as a life-long sinner—in other

words, if I am justified in not being a Roman Catholic, but in working things out as best I may for myself, which indeed I have been always left to do—then I can speak to myself, and to others about myself, in a very different way. I can say that it is not I who in this case am wrong, but the conception of marriage and of woman's nature, tested by which I seem so.

“For who shall tell me that this is not true? Different women have different needs; and the conditions under which many will thrive will kill others. Of course it may be said that life's chief solace is duty, and that it is open to all of us to do that. But even supposing that we all of us acted on this theory, no one could be inhuman enough to deny that some personal happiness is craved for by our nature, to support us in our painful efforts. Well—some women can be made happy by circumstances that are generally pleasing—by a wide circle of friends, and social activities and successés. But with others, the first need of their lives is some

close sympathy and companionship; without this they can enjoy, or indeed be fit for, nothing else; and I don't think that these are the worst women.

“Now if a woman of this kind, young and inexperienced, is married to a man who can never be her companion—married to him, as often happens, before she really knows what she is doing—to what is she condemned by that which conventionally is called morality? I don't want to speak too generally; but indeed I may say this much. Sometimes such a woman is condemned to absolute solitude. When she walks up to the altar she is literally taking the veil, not as a willing bride, but as a nun with no vocation. From that moment the highest faculties of her soul are condemned to be never exercised, its deepest needs never to be satisfied. A husband, by a marriage of this kind, becomes his wife's murderer. He kills her by starvation. He can give her no food himself; and his one active function is to prevent any one else from giving her any. Is a marriage of

this sort a true marriage at all, which shuts a woman out from everything it was meant to open to her? How many women could write that question in tears and blood!

“Of all the great errors of life, an unhappy marriage is for a young wife the greatest. It stands alone in being the most innocent, and also the most remediable. Why must it be the only one for which no remedy is allowed?

“I am not unreasonable—no. We must all of us suffer much; but surely there is a point when unnecessary suffering becomes superfluous suffering. I think that’s true. I would lay down the following rule—a rule indeed which I did my best to follow. Let a wife try—I do not say till seven times, but even to seventy times seven—to give her best to her husband, and get from him something that corresponds to it. Let her do that:—but if, after all her endeavours, he not only refuses to give what her spirit asks of him, but to receive and acknowledge what it offers him, then is it not a mere senseless tyranny to ordain that things which one man has rejected as

worth nothing she may not offer to another, to whom they would perhaps be everything?

“The more I think of it, the more terrible does marriage, as conventionally regarded, seem to me for some women. I see this at times with such a ghastly clearness that I wonder at its escaping any one. For the women I am thinking of, there ought to be a new marriage service written; and the words of it, which need be very few, should say what it really means for them. So far as all their highest sympathies are concerned, and all their capacities for affection other than those which are maternal, such a marriage service might be comprised in Christ’s curse on the fig-tree—‘Let no fruit henceforward grow on thee for ever!’ And of many such women it indeed might be truly said, ‘How soon is the fig-tree which was cursed withered away!’”

A day or two later she went on thus—

“I have been looking back at what I have written. I am anxious to be fair; and I see an important objection to it; but I see also an equally important answer. It may, no doubt,

be urged that if the principle I have hinted at were once admitted and embodied in laws, a woman would be formally justified in yielding herself to any wanton caprice; and family life would have no stability whatever. Yes—but this is only so, not because the principle is bad, but because it is one which laws never can embody fully; because whilst it applies to some cases, it does not apply to others, which, though inwardly different, outwardly seem identical; and because none but those who are themselves concerned can know if it applies to their own.

“What then? Does it come to this—that conduct is right or wrong not in proportion to the extent to which facts justify it, but in proportion to the amount of evidence that could be adduced for such facts in a law-court? No, no,—I will never admit that. If the laws cannot always be fair to us, it is our misfortune; but we shall not mend matters by being unfair to ourselves.

“Here, however, comes another question. I say the law cannot always distinguish one

case from another ; but I have been trying to think out also how we ourselves are to do so. How, of the women whose conduct needs defence, are we to distinguish the good woman from the bad one ? I am not a logician—I can't put things properly ; but I can answer the question to my own satisfaction by merely saying one thing, which I know to be true. Some of the women who, finding no love in marriage, have by the need of their nature been driven to seek it somewhere, are the women who, if married happily, would have been most passionately faithful to their husbands. As for myself, I can indeed speak with confidence. I have never wished to wander ; I have only wished for this—to find some one to whom all my nature may be true. And I have found him !—I have found him !”

When, instead of writing about such matters, she spoke about them to Grenville, there was often something pathetic in her perfect openness and simplicity.

Once she said to him, “Last night I was thinking this—that I should never again be

able to despise any one. But why should I? Is that the test of virtue? You don't think—do you, Bobby—that virtue is the position which enables us to despise others?"

But her questionings of her position, whether expressed dispassionately in writing, or more timidly and more appealingly in speech, had always the same ending. Each new doubt gave way to a new impulse of certainty; and love, for a time kept aloof by argument, returned to enjoy the triumph which argument had again won for it, at once supporting and overwhelming her more completely. He too shared in the result. He followed her even when he seemed to be her guide.

At last came a night, when for the last time in their solitude she felt or gave expression to any of these misgivings. They were together in the boat, which was motionless far out on the lake. The surface of the water was so still as to be invisible. It showed not itself, but only an inverted heaven. Suddenly she said to him after a long silence, during which her eyes had been fixed on the clouds

and stars, "I wonder"—and her eyes now fixed themselves upon his—"I wonder, if some day I were to become very good, whether you would still go on caring for me. Tell me, dear—tell me—would you? You see I often think how I should condemn us, supposing we were two other people."

"If we were not ourselves," he said, answering her in her own words almost, "we should not know the things that are really the most essential facts of our case. Irma," he went on, "listen to me a little. You talk of becoming 'good.' Of course I understand your meaning. Good and bad, pure and impure—no two people could better understand the difference; but our union, whether we condemn or justify it, is not in itself degraded by that which you now are thinking of; rather it is completed and sealed by it. What we call passion is an impulse which can raise men or unutterably degrade them. How shall we each tell ourselves which, in our own case, is its tendency? Not by interrogating the passionate impulse itself, but by asking our-

selves what other impulse it awakens in us—what layer of thoughts it touches and sets free. What are the thoughts that I, Irma, have offered you? Have I ever breathed to you one that was impure or shameful? Have I ever breathed to you one that was not half-brother to a prayer? My passion for you is worship, and my whole being is cleansed by it.”

“Stop, stop,” she said. “No, go on; go on. Do you remember what you told me once, that for people who loved truly you believed the heavens were opened as truly as they were for Stephen? Look up; look up. It seems as if they were opened now. Come, be near me. You never must go away.”

“Irma, Irma, can this indeed be living? It seems to me to be so much more than life. See the depth above us, and the depth reflected under us, holding endless space, and all the endless ages, and ourselves like a ball of thistle-down floating between two eternities. Where that milky light is are new universes forming themselves—the book of their genesis yet remains to be written. From some of

these stars the arrows that to-night reach us started on their vibrating way before Eve's foot was in Eden. Think of the worlds forming, think of the worlds shining, and the darkened suns and systems mute in the night of time. To us, to us, what can it all say, more than the sea says to a rainbow in one tossed bubble of foam? And yet, Irma, to me it seems that it says something."

"What does it say?" she murmured, almost inaudibly.

"It asks, can it have no meaning for us, seeing that we are born of it? And can we be out of harmony with it, seeing that it speaks to us now?"

By and by that night, when he entered the lodge solitary, he heard himself utter aloud this passionate exclamation—"Can it be true? Can it be I am not dreaming? Is the rose indeed in my hands that I always had thought fabulous? Barren garden of life, bitter frost-bitten furrows, can it be that you have blossomed for me into this one wonderful flower?"

CHAPTER XIX.

Most people who have ever amused their idleness by watching the reflections of objects in clear water, are familiar with the experience of seeing real rocks or pebbles force themselves into view through the visionary clouds or foliage. Grenville and Mrs. Schilizzi had soon an experience that was similar, when a packet of forwarded letters arrived one morning from Lichtenbourg.

They were at breakfast at the time, in her sitting-room, the children with them; and Fritz, who brought in a small packet for her, informed his master that for him there was another which had been taken to the lodge. Mrs. Schilizzi glanced hastily at the envelopes. She tore open two or three, and read

the contents indifferently; but finally she came to one at which her expression changed. Grenville looked at her with a vague mis-giving, silently asking her for an explanation.

"It is from my mother-in-law," she said. "I don't know what to do. I really can hardly understand her. It seems that she wants me to go back at once to London."

"What has happened?" he asked. "Is it illness? Is it anything serious?"

"No," she said; "only business. I remember something about it; and something has to be done, about which I have to be consulted, and—more important still—for which they require my signature."

She showed Grenville the letter, and explained what she understood of the case to him. In spite of the rude break which it would make in their present existence, he saw that for her own sake it was really well that she should go; and he pointed out to her what she had not at first realized—that the whole business could be settled within a week.

"Leave the children here," he said, "and ask the Princess to come to them; and before ten days are over you can easily be back again."

"And you," she said, "what will you do?"

"I will come to England also. Who knows but that my letters may also contain a summons? I had but six weeks of freedom, and four have already gone."

She started at these last words, and suddenly seemed scared. "Yes," she faltered, "yes; and what will you do then?"

His eyes dropped. He was silent, lost in perplexed thought. She let the letter fall from her hands, helplessly.

"I feel," she said at last, "as if we had been sailing in a boat of dreams, and were now, with all that belongs to us, being lost upon the rocks of reality."

Her speech roused Grenville. "Nonsense," he exclaimed with a vigour which approached roughness, but which brought her, for this very reason, a certain sense of comfort. "If you and I are only realities to one another,

we shall find that it is not our boat which is the dream, but the rocks, which you fear will wreck it. Come, you mustn't be down-cast. Let me go to the lodge, and look at my own letters; and when I come back you shall see me in the character of a practical man."

There was every need, he found, for at once redeeming this promise. It is true that none of his letters was an absolute summons to return; but there were amongst them two important communications which made him see that his instant return would be desirable. One was from his man of business, the other from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Both of them were serious enough in themselves; but quite apart from the actual news contained in them, they brought him face to face with a number of practical problems which he had known would one day ask for a new solution, but which had till this moment seemed more or less vague and distant. All of a sudden they became close and tangible, and pressed on him as they did so their importunate and painful details.

Returning to Mrs. Schilizzi he discussed their immediate movements. A messenger was despatched to Lichtenbourg, who would go from thence to the Princess, taking a letter to her, and returning that night with an answer: and so soon as arrangements could be made for the proper care of the children, Mrs. Schilizzi would start, by way of Vienna, for England. At first it was assumed that Grenville would travel with her; but suddenly, with a doubtful smile, she said to him—

“Do you think you ought to? Perhaps I am foolishly nervous. I know the world so little, and I never before had occasion to be nervous at all. You must say what is best for me. I trust everything to you.”

“Irma,” he answered earnestly, “I need hardly tell you, for you already are sure enough of it, that except for external circumstances, I would never quit your side. But in this case perhaps it may be best that we go separately—for part of the way at least. Let me think it over by myself, as I put my

own things in order. My own things!" he repeated as he prepared to go back to the lodge. "How wretched to think that my things are for a moment separable from yours!"

As soon as he was alone he set himself to consider the situation. With regard to the journey, he judged it best on the whole that he should precede her to Vienna, where he would meet her and her maid, and go from there in the Orient Express to Paris with them. In this way he would avoid meeting the Princess, who, since he had reached Vicenza, had heard nothing of his movements, and who, if she arrived promptly, as she might very possibly do, would be startled at finding him where he was, in close attendance on her niece.

"How much happier"—the thought came like a cloud—"how much happier life would be, were there nothing in it that required concealing! Any one, up till now, would have been welcome to find me anywhere. And yet," he continued, "we all of us have

our burdens. Let me make the best of this one by the way in which I accept its pain."

Then with a sigh he let these reflections pass, not to leave him—he knew that well—but to take up their lodgings as guests in some dim chamber of his mind; and others succeeded them, in certain respects more formidable, but yet of a kind which he faced with a better heart. The latter, but not the former, he recorded carefully in his diary.

"At last," he wrote, "the test, which I have so often invoked, is going to be applied to me; and I shall be taught by experience whether all this is inspiration or madness, and what sort of stuff I myself am made of. I have often reflected—not with reference to myself, but merely as a general truth—that a man of imaginative temperament buys his moral furniture cheap. He may decorate his mind, as if it were a spiritual palace, with visions of the loftiest feelings, the tenderest sympathies, the purest principles and acts of complete self-sacrifice; and connecting himself with these by a certain imaginative process,

just as he might connect himself with a character in a poem or novel, he may seem to himself to be a fine and sublime person, when he is in reality selfish, and mean, and heartless.

“And now this comes as a question which I—I, Robert Grenville—must answer. Am I myself a person of this kind? Most worthy Judge Eternal—I cannot think except by supposing myself before some such judge—if this be so, to what a depth I must have sunk! For nothing can justify me in my present condition and situation but the fact that I am what I think I am—that I mean my feelings, and shall be true to them not in imagination, but in reality. Do I mean them? Now comes the time for testing whether I do. And I welcome the test. I am impatient to be applying it, like a man who hits himself to make sure that he is awake. It's no good my hitting myself, or I might do so at this moment; but I shouldn't be a truer lover because I gave myself a black eye. How can I laugh? I am not laughing really. Let me

just state it over again—my whole case as it stands.

“Suddenly, during the last three weeks, that strange catastrophe has befallen me, which when happening in the sphere of religion is commonly called *conversion*. A something which I had always considered as something of secondary value has bewildered me by showing itself as the one treasure in life; and for the sake of securing this—so I have told my soul—I have already sacrificed much, and am prepared to sacrifice everything. But what I have sacrificed thus far has been merely certain scruples, which I have indeed respected throughout my life till now, and which I have certainly violated not without a pang; but so long as one’s sacrifices are merely at the expense of one’s scruples, they can hardly be accepted as much evidence of one’s sincerity. I have felt this all the time. Again and again I have said to her, ‘What I long to do is to suffer for you.’ And my meaning I am sure has been—though I did not at first perhaps understand it fully—that

I longed to convince myself of my own absolute sincerity—to convince myself that I was offering her my truth, and not my falsehood.

“Well, sooner than I expected, and more completely than I expected, like a thief in the night, the real trial has come. I see now that if I am genuinely devoted to her, if in any serious and self-denying way I mean to make my life the companion and support of hers, I shall have to sacrifice many things besides scruples. I told her that owing to her I should have to sell my property; and I knew when I said so that this was true. But I thought little—indeed I had hardly time to think—of all that my words meant. I realize what they mean now. I have received a letter informing me that an offer for the whole property has just been made, of a kind unexpectedly liberal. My lawyer tells me that if I am to sell at all, now is my lucky moment; and indeed I can well believe him. Such an offer would probably never be made again. I might have to sell on terms that would leave me a beggar. These will, at all

events, make me sure of a competence. I must decide within three weeks.

“Within three weeks!—so soon to part with everything! I feel like a prisoner who hears that to-morrow is the day of his execution. How near it is all coming! And a fortnight ago the entire prospect was different. Then, instead of selling my home, I saw before me the redemption of it. I saw life and honour returning to the old disconsolate rooms. And now it must all go; it must pass away like a shadow—pictures, furniture, everything, with some few exceptions. And why? For the sake of what? Is it not for the sake of a shadow?—a shadow, a dream, a fancy, of which the very memory will soon be unintelligible? If that were the case, I am certain at least of one thing; I should look on myself as a creature beneath even my own contempt. But it is no dream, no shadow, the thing for which I shall make this sacrifice. I knew it was not. I knew that the feelings within me—the longing, the joy, the worship, the self-devotion—I knew that all these were no

mere idle sentiment, but that for better or worse they were part of my genuine self. And now I am about to prove that my self-knowledge was true. Can my love be unreal, if I am deliberately, for her sake, giving so much up? Or can it possibly be selfish if the things I am giving up are the very things by which self would most be flattered? Irma, I am leaving all for you. I am not pitying myself when I say this. On the contrary, I only want to convince myself that I am not quite unworthy of your love for me.

“I talk about leaving *all*. I speak correctly; for I don't mean my property only. That's something; but I shall have to leave more than that. At all events, I think I shall; and at all events I am prepared to leave it. It is my own career that I am referring to. That would take me to Constantinople, and part me from her for an indefinite period. Irma, for those who are united as you and I are, there must be no separation such as this. For us, who can be bound together by no outer ties, the inner ties must, for that reason, be all the

stronger and closer ; and if any of the links wound me, I shall offer the pain to you, as a sort of secret oblation. Irma, what would preachers and respectable people say, if we told them that love like ours was really the asceticism of love, and demanded far more self-denial and self-restraint than any apparent marriage ? And yet this would be quite true. Listen ! Let me keep as near you as I may, we shall be separated often enough. How often I cannot tell. The difficulties of our future till this morning were mere abstractions to me ; and for the first time now they are becoming hard and real. They may prove eventually to be more or fewer than I anticipate ; but be they what they may, I promise you this faithfully—there shall never be a day or an hour which I could possibly give to you, and which I will fail to give you an account of what it may cost myself.

“The kind, old man who has acted so liberally to me about my marriage, the minister who has taken so friendly an interest in my advancement—to both of these I shall have to

explain myself somehow ; how I hardly know. I shall have, without the delay of a needless day, to make the authorities aware that they must not reckon on my services. It will be difficult. There will be difficulties everywhere. And yet, what am I? I am so mad or so inspired—I have so completely lost my reason, or so completely found my soul—that all these difficulties, even whilst they fret and perplex me, and put an end to these weeks stolen from heaven, are at the same time filling me with exultation, and in every pang they inflict are saying to me, ‘ You are true to her.’”

He wrote this that morning, before rejoining her at luncheon ; and he felt, having done so, more at peace with himself. Of the thoughts he had recorded he said little to her ; but she felt in his manner a certain quality which soothed her. He told her the conclusion he had come to with regard to their journey ; and though she winced at the idea of leaving him even for a day, she agreed that his plan was wise. In the course of the afternoon she said to him, “ If I liked you less I should be

more unhappy at parting from you ; but the more I know you, the more of you enters into my soul, and will still remain with me, even when you are absent. Listen to me. I trust you. These are three short words ; but all that is best and strongest in a woman's passion is implied in them."

Late that night the messenger who had been sent to the Princess returned with a letter from her, full of all sorts of kindness. She said however that to come to the hotel in the forest was an adventure beyond her strength, and she begged that, in their mother's absence, the two children might be sent back to the castle. "In fact," she added, "unless you telegraph to the contrary, I will meet you at Lichtenbourg to-morrow, in the middle of the day, and receive them straight from your hands, as you are on your way to Vienna."

"In that case," said Grenville, "I will be gone by cock-crow. I shall have the start of you by a few hours only. You will reach Vienna at midnight. I will call on you, at your apartments, next morning ; and that

same afternoon we will start together for Paris."

They dined that evening at the lodge, without the children. "In thirty-six hours," she said, "I shall again be with you; but still, since we have been known and belonged to one another, this is our first good-bye. Will you think me doubtful and fretful if I ask you one thing? Are you sure you will be mine always—mine always and in every way, as you are now?" There was a gentle solemnity both in her voice and look which produced the sensation in him of being bound afresh to her—bound by a new link which was indeed unnecessary, but the added pressure of which he felt and received with gratitude. As he walked back with her to her door, she clung to his arm like a child being taken to school, and about to be parted from its parent. The starlight showed on her cheeks something that gleamed like dew; and as she hid them and dried them on his sleeve, she murmured, "I want never to leave you."

Grenville had to start by four o'clock in the

morning. The sinking moon still shone as he dressed himself; but none of the lights of day were yet astir amongst the eastern clouds. The lamps of the carriage he was to travel in were staring with their nocturnal eyes; and he drove off behind the four jangling horses, feeling as if all the world were from henceforward to be night. Knowing that the sight would pain him, he turned to watch the hotel, as a man whose tooth is aching cannot resist touching it; and a desolating sense filled him, that though she would be soon restored to him, the conditions of their perfect union were done with, were lost for ever. The mysterious forests at first saturated with the darkness, and then, as the wan dawn touched them, yielding it up like an exhalation, would at any other time have charmed and aroused his fancy. But now every mile of the road meant to him one thing only—a return from Eden, into the forgotten troubles of life. Lichtenbourg, with its hotels and gardens, as he reached it in the ashy twilight, chilled him with vivid memories of his first days of acquaintance with it.

Those days, as he looked back to them now, were coloured with the light of what succeeded them. They were vivid with hope and promise ; but they were past, and their promise seemed vain. Horses were changed at the Hôtel Impérial, where he had stayed. The front doors were closed ; but his mind through the shuttered glass saw the gleam of a certain brown hat and dress, which had appeared to him on the sunny morning of a day that fluttered with cherry-blossoms. "Irma ! Irma !" he constantly muttered to himself as he waited ; and then presently the horses were put to, and whatever he muttered further, the bells and the wheels drowned it.

CHAPTER XX.

WHEN he reached the railway-station he experienced another shock. His life of late had been so removed from the world, and had given time such a new and expanded value, that though hardly three weeks ago he had arrived at this very place, a train seemed as strange to him as if he had not seen one for years; and the musty smell breathing from the red plush cushions of his compartment, where the confined air was at once close and chilly, seemed to him like the soul of our common unprofitable life. This journey to Vienna he compared dreamily with his last, when his mind was perplexed with thoughts about Lady Evelyn, stimulated with thoughts of his own brilliant prospects, and troubled—

little as he at the time knew it—by her, under whose influence all these prospects were to evaporate. “I can hardly believe,” he reflected, “all that has happened to me in a fortnight. All those interests I had meant to live for, and even the very world that holds them, I have already resolved to sacrifice, and am now on my way to do so. I can hardly imagine the value I once set on them. On the other hand, the thing which I value now, and for the sake of which I am renouncing everything else, is a pearl hid in a field which I flattered myself I should never enter.”

When he reached Vienna about three in the afternoon, the change which had taken place in himself came home to him yet more vividly. The last time he had been there, and especially the time before, the very air of the streets had been provocative, whispering in his ear ambition. He had felt himself becoming one of the most important figures of Europe, and about to be honoured and welcomed as a part of its most stately life; whilst the pride of blood which underlay his desire of achievement had

been stimulated there as it could have been nowhere else. But now all was different. The very reasons which formerly had made the Austrian capital, with all its glitter of to-day and all its traditions of yesterday, seem to him familiar and sympathetic, made it now seem bleak and alien. He felt as if no longer he had either part or lot in it. Under other circumstances, without losing an hour, he would have gone to the British Embassy to see the Ambassador and his wife; but now, though he thought of them still as two of his best friends, he shrank from the atmosphere which breathed through their bright drawing-rooms. It was once his natural element; he would now move like a ghost in it.

Far more answering to his mood was what he actually did. He went to the offices of the International Sleeping-Car Company and took the necessary places for Paris in next day's Orient Express. In doing this he was conscious of doing something, not for himself only, but also for the woman he was devoted to; and the simple act seemed to be bringing him close

to her. He even rejoiced in himself paying for an extra ticket in order that she and her maid might be secure of a compartment to themselves. That business concluded, he rambled through the town like a tourist, and presently bethought himself of going to the Ring or Boulevard, in which her apartment was situated, and taking a look at her windows. This he found, however, was hardly an attainable solace, as there was nothing to tell him which her windows were. They were somewhere or other in a huge block of building, whose frontage was rough with carving and gay with extended awnings, the upper part being devoted to flats or offices, the lower to glittering shops. Mrs. Schilizzi's flat was apparently over the shop of a jeweller, and some of the objects in which were at once so tasteful and splendid that Grenville for a minute or two stood in the street studying them. Whilst thus engaged he was startled by the sound of his own name, pronounced with a charming though very foreign inflection ; and looking round he discovered the Countess

C——, who had just emerged from the jeweller's swing-doors.

She was full of questions which she gave him no time to answer, and then of invitations, answers to which she demanded ; but, finding that Grenville was only a bird of passage, and that he could neither come to her castle in the country nor join her in her box at the opera, she insisted on taking him off that moment for a drive in the Prater. Unwilling to yield, he had yet no excuse for refusing. A huge engine of torture in the shape of a heavy barouche, with two gawky footmen in salmon-coloured stockings, attending it, was there touching the curbstone ; and this was presently bearing him away with the Countess, hardly more willing than Proserpine when she went from the fields of Enna.

Till they reached the Prater *ennui* was his chief suffering, but here *ennui* was lost in a kind of painful interest. As they drove through the crowd of carriages, or paused now and then under the trees, the Countess kept pointing out to him this and that personage, one

great as a magnate, one fascinating as a beauty, whom he ought to know, and whom he would know, would he only stay in Vienna. Some of these desirable acquaintances stopped for a moment and spoke to her; and Grenville noticed in men and women both the same charm of manner which had at once attracted him in the Countess. Suddenly a carriage came by, the harness glancing with silver and the servants breasting the air with gold lace and crimson waistcoats. It contained two ladies and a dark-bearded, handsome man.

"Look," said the Countess, "there is the King of Moldavia."

Grenville turned, but it was not the king he looked at. What held his attention was two faces under parasols. Of one he only saw that it was middle-aged, refined, and cynical. The other he recognized by its wonderful velvety eyes—a face now set off by a dress almost insolent in its daintiness. Every one as it passed gave it the homage of a stare. It was the face of Miss Juanita Markham.

"The woman with her," said the Countess, "is the well-known Baroness X——. I suppose you have heard *her* story. Your pretty compatriot is hardly to be congratulated on her friend; and as for the king, they say he is tiring of her already."

All this spectacle, varying, bewildering, brilliant, with a key to it here and there given by the Countess's comments, had for Grenville, no doubt, a degree of interest; but it pained and chilled him in two distinct ways. It made him feel how Mrs. Schilizzi was taking him away from it; and also how *it*, at the moment, was taking him away from Mrs. Schilizzi. His imagination, he felt, was being invaded by a vulgar crowd out of the street, which divided him from her to whom all its domain was consecrated. "Irma! Irma!" he again repeated to himself passionately, but under his breath, and with a due mundane self-repression, so that the Countess, who once actually caught a murmur, concluded that he was merely blowing away a speck of dust from his waistcoat.

At last his trial was over. The Countess dropped him at his hotel. The moment the porter saw him he put into his hand a letter. Grenville received it eagerly, fancying it might be from Mrs. Schilizzi. It was not. It was from the Ambassadors, who had somehow heard of his arrival. She begged him to come that night to dinner; there would be no party. He despatched an acceptance, resigned rather than pleased; and, indeed, when the time came he was little less than miserable. His host and hostess talked to him so much of his prospects; and he could not explain that they were now his prospects no longer. He was conscious of their wishes for his success, but their very wishes irritated him. He felt as jealous of any influence that would draw him from Mrs. Schilizzi as he could feel of any that would draw her from him. A strange sensation was dawning on him that his affection for her was, except for herself, making him alone in life—a pariah amongst those who had hitherto formed the world for him. He was not afraid of the situation. It only made him feel how

entirely he depended upon her. Wearied with the fatigues of the day, he returned to his hotel early, and was just preparing to close his eyes, and so to abridge the hours which still separated him from her, when the thought suddenly struck him that it might be a help and a pleasure to her if he went to the station and met her on her arrival. To rouse himself now was really a matter of effort ; his eyelids were so heavy he could hardly keep them apart. But rouse himself he did, and redressed himself ; and driving to the station, he awaited her. As the train came drifting in, he half feared that something would have detained her, and his heart gratuitously embittered itself with a pang of anticipated disappointment. Amongst the dim figures that emerged he soon detected hers, and hastened to her glowing with sudden happiness. With a start of surprise and pleasure, she gave him her hand and looked at him, but the moment after the pleasure gave place to nervousness, and her voice hardening and acquiring a note of petulance, " You shouldn't

have come," she said. "Please go away and leave me."

"Can I do," he said, "nothing for you? May not I get you a carriage?"

"No, no," she said, almost turning her back on him. "Good-night; you can call at twelve to-morrow." The next moment he saw her hasten towards a man—a tall, corpulent man, whose hands glistened with rings, and who, with the aid of his nose, suggested finance and Israel. With her hand on the sleeve of this gentleman's furred overcoat, she quickly disappeared in the direction of the cabs and omnibuses.

Grenville returned to the bed in which he had been about to rest himself, full of a bewildered bitterness which made rest impossible. He could not banish her strange reception of him from his memory. Her voice through the watches of the night kept ringing and echoing in his ears; and hour by hour its tone became harder and more bitter, till her image at last appeared to him, as he lay there half dreaming, like that of a woman who had

suddenly grown to hate him, and having ruined his life was going now to spurn it away from her. The misery of this experience was increased by its entire unexpectedness. It staggered him. The elements of his life appeared to him in some new combination like a kaleidoscope shaken by the Furies.

His condition next morning was somewhat calmer ; but a sense of estrangement from her remained with him even then, and anxiety branded his forehead with its keen physical pain. But through all this he was famishing for her presence ; and it wanted still a good ten minutes to twelve when he was standing at the door of the building in which her apartment was, and rousing the concierge with a peal of the electric bell.

"The first floor," said the man. "The first door on the right."

And Grenville, with trembling hand, was presently again ringing. A white-capped woman with an inquiring look admitted him, and, passing through a lobby in which the carpets were up, he found himself in a large

drawing-room overlooking the street. There were no traces of life in it, except that on one of the tables was a pair of gloves and a parasol, both of which he recognized. He looked about him, full of curious interest. The floor was covered with thick red velvet carpet. There were red velvet chairs and sofas, whose woodwork was sumptuously carved, but which suggested the fittings of an hotel rather than of a private dwelling. The walls were papered with staring brown and gold, relieved only by two large mirrors and a life-sized photograph of the Emperor, liberally coloured in oil. Here and there were some fine vases and candelabra, but they seemed arranged for sale rather than ornament; and the only other objects that decorated the shelves and tables were some ormolu trays for cigar-ash, some inlaid cabinets for cigars, and several sets of bottles and glasses for liqueurs, coloured and gilt as gaudily as artists in glass could make them. One thing more he discovered, and one thing only. It was a photograph lying under one

of the ormolu ash-trays, faded and ragged, and representing a half-clothed Viennese actress.

Anything more depressing, anything more hopelessly *bourgeois*, it would hardly have been possible to imagine. And this was the home, or at least one of the homes, of the woman to whom he was devoting everything! He thought of the drawing-rooms at the Embassy, and compared them with it. They seemed to belong to two wholly different universes—designed for the lives of people who had not a thought in common. A surprise which he could not analyze at first occupied his mind, and made him forget how the time was passing; but at last it gave place to wonder as to when Mrs. Schilizzi would present herself; and wonder by and by gave place to impatience and resentment.

Of all the troubles of life, the suspense of protracted waiting, with every nerve of doubt, of hope, and of expectant hearing stretched upon the rack, is, in proportion to its real importance, the hardest for some tempera-

ments to bear. Grenville now discovered his own temperament to be one of these ; and it is no exaggeration to say that he soon was enduring tortures. Hitherto, though like most men he knew what pain was, he had rarely, if ever, known himself robbed by it of his self-control. Now he found himself at its mercy. Angry, savage thoughts came leaping into his consciousness—creatures till now hidden in the unexplored jungles of his mind, longing to lacerate the woman whose conduct seemed so heartless, and lacerating him meanwhile in their blind fantastic fury. As he stood amongst them he felt like a man amongst a pack of wolves, trying to beat them down, to kill them, or to cow them into silence, and yet strong with a temptation to let them have their way, on the woman and on himself also. Once, one memorable day, he had indeed quarrelled with her before, and thought bitter things of her ; but that passed quickly—that he had quite forgotten. And then, only last night, he had experienced pain on her account, of a new kind. But that was

pain merely ; this was humiliation mixed with pain. He hardly recognized himself.

At last—and it seemed he had been kept on the rack for hours—he heard, or thought he heard, something like a distant rustle. All his senses of a sudden turned into hearing. He held his breath ; the noises in the street became audible—carriages, people talking. Then he started ; the door burst open ; and there before him, her eyes eager with welcome, was the woman for whom he waited.

She looked at him ; she came up to him. She was wholly, entirely different from the distorted image which his mind had been just fashioning ; but the stress of his late mood was still affecting his muscles, and his voice and look as he greeted her were, against his will, unnatural. Her greeting to him had been what it used to be in the forest, at once gentle and passionate ; and it was not for a minute or two that she took note of his change. At last she said, scanning him—

“What’s the matter with you ? Are you

angry? Have I kept you waiting? Am I late?"

"Oh, no," he said, smiling in spite of himself, "only three-quarters of an hour." His words dragged bitterly, and he hesitated. "It wasn't that," he went on; "only after your anger last night, I felt rather doubtful if you ever would come at all. I thought, you see, that at the station I might have been some help to you. In fact I got out of bed in the middle of the night to come. You must forgive me for doing unintentionally what roused in you so much resentment."

For the first time the idea seemed to dawn on her that she had done or said anything which could possibly wound his feelings. A flush came into her cheeks, and a sudden moisture into her eyes, and putting her hands on his shoulders, she whispered, "Dear, forgive me. Come, sit down. We are all alone—forgive me. But, dear, you were indeed imprudent. If he had seen you meeting me at night—well, you know the impression it would have given. Was I unkind or rude

to you? I felt so afraid and nervous, I hardly know what I said; and I trusted you so completely, I felt you would understand."

The trouble was over, and peace had again returned to him.

"In twenty minutes," she said, "I have told them to bring luncheon. Oh, do look round, and tell me what you think of this place. Will you dislike me when you see the kind of home I belong to? Isn't it all dreadful, Bobby?" she went on presently. "Doesn't it tell you a little about what my life is? Paul thinks it quite splendid. At first I tried to alter it; but it made him perfectly furious. He swore at me. Shall I show you something? Paul did more than swear." She began whilst she spoke to pull up one of her sleeves. "Look at my arm," she said, "a little above my wrist. Do you see the scar on it? Wait, and I will explain its history to you."

She went to a drawer in a cabinet, and brought out an ivory paper-knife. "Paul," she said, "struck me with that because I told

him this room was vulgar, and wanted to put away these terrible sets of liqueur things. And then—I see you’ve been looking at that photograph.”

“Who is it?” said Grenville.

She blushed a little, and gave a little faint laugh. “That,” she said, “is one of my many rivals. When Paul is in Vienna without me, that lady reigns here. I believe she chose the furniture. Paul supposes I know nothing about her; and this he must have left by accident. He has the oddest notions of respectability so far as I am concerned; and he thinks I ought to be ignorant that bad women exist. Ah!” she exclaimed, sighing, and suddenly changing the subject, not as if it pained but merely repelled and wearied her, “how often when I looked round this prison have I thought of my own home—the shelves crowded with old well-worn books, the faded chintz, and the thread-bare carpets—and our boxes of wooden bricks! I used always,” she said, laughing suddenly, “to be building castles on the floor with-

bricks. Since then, Bobby, I have been driven to build them only in the air. Hark—hark! Gretchen is coming with the luncheon. As soon as we have lunched, you must go; and you must meet me punctually at the train."

When he rose to leave her, she said, hanging her head, "There is something I should like you to see—something I found here in my room. And yet—I don't know—shall I show it to you? It's Paul's photograph. You've seen his friend. Perhaps you had better see him. I will show it you in the train."

He was at the station before her, watching the passengers for the express, as they slowly assembled, and hoping they would all be strangers. He deputed Fritz to wait for Mrs. Schilizzi, to help her maid with the luggage, and to see them settled in their places. Until the train had started, he had hardly done more than speak to her; but as soon as they were off, and found themselves surrounded by strangers only, they secured a couple of comfortable chairs in the saloon, and engaged

a table for dinner in the restaurant car adjoining. It was five when they started in the mellow and golden afternoon; and the air from the gardens in the suburbs came with a gust of summer. In half an hour they were nearing meadows and wooded hills, vivid with exuberant green; and the shining curves of the Danube began to show and hide themselves, here reflecting a sail, here a town or a villa, and here the domes and façade of some palatial monastery. During their dinner they had drifted, not perceiving it, into the night; and the windows, instead of revealing the moving landscape, did but repeat the light of the lamps in the gilded roof. Mrs. Schilizzi retired with her maid to her own compartment, and Grenville shared his with a pasha and two Roumanians. The following morning, again in the warmth and sunlight, their eyes began to be greeted by lodges and blossoming gardens, and houses with mansard roofs. Then came buildings stretching in long white masses, and tall brick chimneys pricking the clear blue air. The train rattled over

points, and they were soon stationary in Paris.

As for the photograph, she had quite forgotten to show it to him. To both of them the journey had been one long idyll ; and they had almost banished from their minds the doubtful sequel it was leading to. But an hour or two later the aspect of things had changed. After a hasty meal, they found themselves at the Gare du Nord, getting what seats they could in the crowded train for Calais. English newspapers were being sold. A variety of vulgar English were pushing and swaggering as only our vulgar can. A man with a cockney twang had a seat next Mrs. Schilizzi, and was solacing himself with sucking cherries, and throwing the stones past her out of the window ; and when presently he began quoting to a friend opposite him the refrain of some song popular at the London music-halls, she and Grenville felt that for a second time they had dropped down out of cloudland, and would have to face and struggle with the squalid difficulties of reality.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. SCHILIZZI was to be met at Charing Cross by her mother-in-law—a lady whose instincts always distrusted beauty, and who, strong in the virtue that comes of having never possessed it, felt herself bound, whenever circumstances admitted, to act towards her daughter-in-law the part of a guardian angel. Her zeal, indeed, was much in excess of that which a well-worn simile ascribes to the angels of tradition; and instead of contenting herself with keeping her charge under her wing, she endeavoured to hold her fast in the grip of her guardian clutches. Grenville gathered this and more from what Mrs. Schilizzi told him. He accordingly parted from her at Dover, taking the train to

Victoria, and engaging not to call on her till she wrote to him to give him instructions.

He saw her as he turned away, looking after him through the crowd, which at last hid her; and a puff of briny wind swept between them laden with the smoke and odour of the packet. Having reached London at six, and having slept or tried to sleep for an hour or two, he found himself by twelve washed and brushed and dressed, and, so far as externals went, ready to face the world. But the world that was now around him seemed blanker than the sands of Sahara.

Everything bewildered him. At first he could hardly realize what time of the year it was, or in which of its social stages he might expect London to be. Was the season in full swing, or had he, by chance, lit upon the Whitsuntide holidays? Or was it possibly Easter? These questions presented themselves not because he wished for society, but for a reason precisely opposite. He dreaded the very sight or sound of it. Could he have so arranged it, he would willingly have seen

no one till the hour came when he should again see Mrs. Schilizzi. That, however, at the earliest would not be till to-morrow; and meanwhile matters admitting of no delay—matters fraught not with pain only, but with embarrassment, and also with the fate of his whole future life, were calling on him for instant action, and granting him no reprieve. His eyes, as he thought this over, wandered wearily round his sitting-room. Everything had an air of being blighted—even the light that turned the windows into two staring oblongs. He looked on the wall above his sideboard—an unnatural blank. His favourite painting had gone from it. He looked at a drawing of his home. His home was about to go. In his looking-glass were still sticking a few dusty cards of invitation. One of them bore the name of the then celebrated Lady —, the wife of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Grenville remembered the party it referred to—his last before leaving England—a small and brilliant concert, not a political mob. He remembered

his hostess, when he left, coming with him to the door of the room, detaining him there in conversation, and going out with him into the corridor ; and he thought of how presently he would be returning to the same house, not to fulfil but to destroy the hopes that were then formed of him.

Here were two people—his lawyer and the Chancellor of the Exchequer—whom he ought to see at once, and for seeing whom he ought then and there to prepare. And also—more formidable still—he would have to communicate with Lord Solway. But he felt unequal to any one of these tasks, or even to the preparation for them. His mind shrank from them with an aversion at once weary and irritable, and wandered away to an unknown suburban villa, till a longing to reach it—a longing which he knew to be futile—threatened to unfit him for any species of exertion. A man's strength of character, however, is shown not in having no weakness, but in conquering it ; just as the highest bravery is the conquest, rather than the

absence, of fear. And Grenville presently, contemptuous of his subdued condition, pulled together his faculties by a strong effort of will, and forced them to their distasteful duties.

First of all he began to write to the Chancellor, hardly knowing, when he took the pen in his hand, what he was going to say, or what position he should assume. But thoughts, however scattered, are things which, in many cases, need only a severe enough summons to gather them together in an instant. Men often wait idly for their thoughts to inspire their will; whereas what they really need is, that their will should compel their thoughts. Grenville found out this; and presently, to his own surprise, a letter was written which exactly suited the situation. With every phrase of regret which could flatter the person he was addressing, he stated that private matters, which did not admit of explanation, would prevent his going, at the time arranged, to Constantinople; and indeed had rendered his whole plans so uncertain, that he feared he must abandon all claim to the privilege of

serving the Government. There was, he added, another competent candidate for the post he was thus renouncing; and he concluded his letter by saying that his worst regrets were tempered by the knowledge that his loss could be so well supplied.

This letter he at once despatched by messenger; and he then drove off to his lawyer's. As his cab carried him towards the dim regions of Bloomsbury, he kept saying to himself, "What have I done? Do I realize it?" His head and his eyelids ached, and his eyes were becoming dizzy. But the task he had just accomplished, whatever might be its results, he found had been easy compared to the one now before him. The loss of his career was something vague; and for the present, at all events, he could contemplate it with dull apathy; but he was keenly alive to the meaning of this second act of sacrifice. He knew how heavy his hand would feel the pen which would cut him off for ever from the old home of his fathers, and leave him—so he felt—a naked waif in the world. When he

entered. the dirty passage leading to his lawyer's offices, his sense of all this grew deeper; and a back parlour in which he was asked to wait, furnished with some japanned deed-boxes and a couple of old dining-room chairs, seemed to him a condemned cell. He thought of his haunted forest, the lodge, the lake, the starlight; and then of these surroundings; and he asked himself if these two sets of things could be both realities; or, if not, which of them was the dream. The result was that, though his purpose never wavered, he humoured his weakness by postponing the fatal act. He contented himself with examining the details of the offer made, ascertaining afresh the present state of the property, and saying that his decision should be given in a few days. "And yet," he asked himself, when he was once more in the street, "why do I hesitate? I thought just now I was going to sell my home. I forgot myself. A man situated as I am has no home. I must now write to Lord Solway, and explain to him that I shall never have one."

This last was the hardest task of any, not because of the act of renunciation involved in it, but because of the difficulty of assigning for it the smallest reason. Sheets of note-paper and some pens were still lying on his table; and he was affected by them as a sea-sick man is by the chance sight of food. But again by force of will he compelled his thoughts to his service, and cut a way through obstacles which a moment since seemed insuperable.

He apologized for not having written earlier, to describe the upshot of his meeting with Lady Evelyn at Vicenza. He then explained that, far from having been able to propose to her, he had come to feel doubtful as to whether she even valued his company, and that before he could assure himself as to how matters really stood, her aunt's illness had for the time stopped everything. Here he suddenly paused, wondering how he should proceed. His letter thus far had the merit of being perfectly true; but as to his political career, how could he be equally candid?

Lord Solway in that career had taken an almost fatherly interest. Grenville could not palm off on him a mere reference to "private matters," and say that his career was abandoned for indefinite and mysterious reasons. "And yet," he thought, "what is there I can say?" He detested falsehood, and it was impossible even to hint at the truth. At last he wrote as follows—"With regard to my appointment at Constantinople, there is still much to be settled; and it is partly on account of that, that I have returned to London. My confidence alike in your kindness and your profound knowledge of the world, enables me to say to you what another might misinterpret as ungrateful; and this is, that all these affairs of mine, which you have so generously tried to forward, are now in a condition to prosper best by being left to slowly settle themselves, unquestioned and unnoticed. In telling you this," Grenville added after a moment's hesitation, "I need hardly ask you to forgive me."

This letter he sent by post, feeling no

special desire to expedite its arrival. He then went out for an hour or two, and avoiding the fashionable quarters, wandered about aimlessly, thinking of Mrs. Schilizzi, whose inaccessible form was painted on a background of unfamiliar wretchedness. At last, compelled by mere physical fatigue, he returned to his own rooms, thinking over what he had accomplished, or almost accomplished, that day — namely, the deliberate surrender of three things, his ambition, his property, and all prospects of a home. A sense of forlornness suddenly settled down on him, through which, indeed, the thought of Mrs. Schilizzi shone tremulously like a star; but, like a star, at the moment it seemed hopelessly far away. “When,” he exclaimed, “when—when shall I see you again?”

His whole soul seemed to be saying to him, “You have made yourself quite alone in the world.” And the same conclusion was presented to him in a homelier and more tangible form, when he thought of the evening that now awaited him so blankly. Should he dine

at a club, or at a restaurant? Or should he dine anywhere?

In the middle of this perplexity a knock at the door roused him, and Fritz entered with a note. His heart throbbed with a hope that it might be from Mrs. Schilizzi. It was not. It was from Lord Solway. It was an urgent invitation to dinner for that night. He despatched an acceptance. The thought of society was hateful to him; but still more hateful was the leaden intolerable time, which still lay between him and Mrs. Schilizzi; and society would assist in abridging it. Whilst he was dressing, a large envelope was presented to him, from which he extracted a card for yet another entertainment—a party at the house of the Chancellor of the Exchequer—a card with the flattering words, “To meet their Royal Highnesses,” at the top; and these yet more flattering words, “Very small,” at the bottom.

The moment he entered Lord Solway’s drawing-room, he saw that the party was one of the most dignified kind. Stately brocades

gleamed, and there was a general palpitation of diamonds. No Royalty was present; but the first person he recognized was a dowager whose well-known features were usually a sign that a king or prince was in the neighbourhood. There was more than one blue riband, and but one unmarried woman—the daughter of a widowed ambassador. Lord Solway shuffled up to Grenville, and welcomed him with a benignant smile, which, despite its benignity to friends, seemed to hint that it could be saturnine to enemies.

“You wrote me,” he said, with a sort of hollow chuckle, “a very nice—a very nice, sensible letter. It contained only one thing for which you ought to apologize.”

“And what,” said Grenville, “was that?”

“Your apology,” said Lord Solway. “Come—I must take you to the young lady—I don’t know if you know her—whom you are to make happy this evening. Lady ——” he said, pausing before a magnificently dressed widow of sixty, “this is a young man dying to make your acquaintance. He’s come all

the way from Vienna to take you in to dinner."

"How silly he is!" said the lady, who blushed and bridled, till one of her chins overlapped her emerald necklace. "I've known Mr. Grenville for years; and I saw him at Vienna a month since. Mr. Grenville, is not Lord Solway silly?"

She was indeed one of the luncheon party which Grenville had encountered at the Embassy; and however absent or dejected he might be at heart, she left him at dinner no time to betray himself. Gossip and scandal, balls, liaisons, and marriages, came from her lips sparkling like a succession of pearls; and she had never showed to greater advantage her talent for two things, which are not perhaps as different as might be thought from the names she gave them—picking people to pieces, and putting two and two together. Want of charity, however, has this advantage over charity, that it sometimes fails at last; and it did so on this occasion. Lady —— found towards the middle of dinner that the

characters of all her acquaintance had died a painless death at her hands ; so she left them in Grenville's memory, where she knew they would come to life again, and turning to her other neighbour, a widowed duke of seventy, renewed, with a well-preserved archness for which she happened to be celebrated, an attack on his ducal heart, which practice enabled him to resist.

although
In spite of himself, Grenville was becoming amused. The very look of the table with its piles of splendid plate—presents from crowned heads to a field-marshal, Lord Solway's father—in itself was some distraction. On the other side of him was the one unmarried lady, with the face of five-and-twenty and the happy *aplomb* of forty. Grenville knew her by sight, but he had never made her acquaintance ; and he was pleasantly flattered now, when, the moment his widow had discarded him, she met his eyes with a smile, and quickly began a conversation. She seemed quite aware that he had just come from Vienna, and treated his appointment at Con-

stantinople as a matter of public news. She was acquainted with both cities, and talked about both pleasantly, giving her social judgments neatly, like the strokes of an artist's pencil, never laughing at any one, not even the widow near them, but letting it be seen constantly that she could laugh if she chose ; and all through this, by some subtle elusive means, not designedly, but as if by a natural instinct, she contrived to make Grenville conscious of two flattering facts—that she felt him to be an interesting man, and that she knew him to be a distinguished one. The anxiety and the longing for the absent, which was really occupying his mind, began to be overlaid and hidden by a little superficial pleasure ; and after a time he felt himself taking note that the speaker's lips were pretty, and that her right cheek had a dimple. But the moment this crossed his mind, with a sudden and painful vividness, another image—other lips and cheeks—hovered before his like an image painted on the air. The first thing that reminded him of the charm of woman's

beauty repelled him from the women present, glorifying the woman absent; and, completely for a second or two losing command of his thoughts, he actually found himself murmuring the words, "Irma! Irma!" He turned to his neighbour. She was looking at him. There was no help for it—he lied. "I'm right again now," he said. "I just had a twinge of neuralgia."

After dinner he fell an easier prey to the flattery, merely social, of the elderly great ladies; and one of them, who discovered that he had been asked to the party in Downing Street, offered to take him in her carriage with her. He went. There were many hours that still required killing. Before going to bed he wished to be absolutely tired, or he should not, he knew, get a single hour's repose.

During the drive his whole unhappiness returned to him, yawning again before him like a gulf which some film had hidden, and in the depths of it Mrs. Schilizzi glimmered, unattainable as in a dream. The lighted doors in Downing Street, the red baize and

the linkmen, the flower-like figures in the hall making their way to the cloak-room, all seemed to him like the entrance to hell or purgatory; and the party proved an ordeal far worse than the dinner. To the marked notice of Royalty he was not indeed insensible; but it affected his memory as a gift of money might affect some poor woman mourning for the loss of her child; and as for the feminine beauty which was moving on all sides of him, it merely chilled him with a sense of the beauty that was not amongst it. Several women, young, and even there exceptional for their charms, showed themselves delighted to see him, and counted on him returning the feeling. The feeling was not at his command, but the manner and look proper to it, from mere force of habit, came to his aid and produced themselves; and any one watching him would have thought on two or three occasions that he had fallen a happy victim to the eyes that were then detaining him. Several observers indeed did think so; but no observer could have known

that at the very moment when appearances seemed most to warrant such conclusions, the name of an absent woman was still secretly on his lips, and that the touch of a hand not hers on his arm as he went to supper sent through his nerves a shudder as if it had been some pollution.

Thus drew to its close his first day in London. It began as a sombre, and then turned to a sparkling, desolation; and when at last he went to bed, how did it end? It ended with a hope of a certain letter next morning—a hope so intense that it defeated its own ends, and was troubled and made sick by doubt.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE morning came. A few letters were brought to his bedside. For a moment or two he held them in his hands, keeping his eyes closed, and not daring to look at them, he was so perversely fearful of finding that there was none from her. However, there was one. It was merely a hasty scrawl; its wording was curt and almost careless; but it begged him to call on her that morning at twelve. "I have told my mother-in-law," it continued, "that you know Lichtenbourg and its neighbourhood; and she is pleased to consider that as a sufficient explanation of your existence."

In one way he was delighted. He would be with her sooner than he had expected.

He had, however, the preceding night promised his host to call at twelve in Downing Street ; and there was some awkwardness in postponing so important an engagement. Postpone it he did, however, despatching a messenger with a letter, full of excuses which were not perhaps very accurate. But the messenger had hardly been gone for half an hour when a telegram reached him from her, begging him to come at four. Here was a double annoyance—first, the dreary interval thus suddenly thrust between him and the time for meeting her, and then a confused sense of that strange feminine selfishness which will allow a woman sometimes to disregard in a man's life every claim or interest not immediately connected with herself. For a moment there blew through his mind a little east wind of reproaches against her ; but this spent itself, and without losing a moment, he hurried off to Downing Street, reaching it before his messenger. He was naturally too early, and passed, as he knew he should have to do, a good half-hour of waiting, which his

thoughts made anxious and miserable. He had time to arrange—more time than he wanted—precisely what he should say at the forthcoming interview ; but every moment his considerations were either disturbed or shifted by thoughts of the woman without whom he could hardly breathe. The room in which he found himself was surrounded by rows of blue-books ; and blue-books and Acts of Parliament loaded the solid tables. He took one or two of ~~them~~, and tried to calm himself by reading them. But through the paper, through the paragraphs and the tabulated figures, would flicker a vision of a brown hat fluttering with feathers, and of cheeks like pale geranium petals. A physical weight seemed to be lying on his chest and smothering him. He could not read ; he could only keep moving about restlessly. He could think of one thing only which would have given him immediate solace ; and that was to tear in pieces a Report on the last census, which he had twice taken up, and opened in the same place, which had maddened him with

an intolerable analysis of the occupations of adults in Lancashire. But he heroically resisted this temptation of the devil; and a secretary at last appeared, who invited him into the sanctum of the minister. The result of the interview was more satisfactory than he had hoped. It settled nothing, and therefore was quickly over; and he went away made almost buoyant by the news that it would be quite possible, owing to certain recent events, to give him, if he wished it, another two months before he would be obliged to enter on his post or to resign it. The Chancellor also had said to him, "If you are not leaving London immediately, there are one or two matters in which you might be of the greatest help to me; and I know that the Prime Minister, as well, would be anxious to have some talk with you."

But the pleasurable sense of importance which these last intimations gave him, had long been driven from his mind by very different matters, when at four o'clock he found himself on the heights of Hampstead;

and after much inquiry of the way, and many misdirections, his cab stopped at the gate of a large semi-detached villa, which was separated from the road by a walk and a few flower-beds. As he rang the bell a presentiment he was unable to conquer filled his mind that she would not be true to her appointment; and he stood expecting the misery of learning that this was so, and hated the windows that stared at him, and showed him their dull rep curtains. The door was opened by a man-servant, who looked like a dissenting minister; and when Grenville heard from him that Mrs. Schilizzi actually was at home, the evangel that came from such a mouth seemed almost incredible. He entered. He was conscious of some hall-chairs and a barometer, and also of a smell of floor-cloth and distant cooking. He was shown into a drawing-room on the ground-floor, where there were paper flowers in the fire-place, where French polish breathed from the rosewood furniture, and where a flock of antimacassars had settled themselves down

like sea-gulls. Grenville looked round him, as one dismayed and curious. There were some large, but not beautiful, pieces of oriental china ; some large but hideous mirrors ; some pictures in oil of ladies in beaded gowns, and between them some photographs, edged in black, of tombs. On one table were two busts and a tea-caddy ; on another a gilt Bible, and a set of ivory chess-men. There was a copy of Scott's poems in a varnished tartan binding ; there was a volume of *Texts for the Elect, for every Day in the Year* ; and under this some numbers of a well-known financial newspaper. At last, on the chimney-piece, Grenville discovered to his surprise some genuine Greek vases, of extreme beauty and grace, with figures of the Amazons on them, and of some sacrificial procession ; but all were masked in petticoats of opaque spotted muslin, in deference—so it seems—to British ideas of decorum. The beauty of the objects themselves, and the charming modesty of their disguise, saved him from the pangs of some moments of expectancy ; and he was still

beguiled by a sense of unexpected amusement, when an opening door startled him, and Mrs. Schilizzi entered.

He had been secretly annoyed here, even more than he had been at Vienna, by being forced to connect her with surroundings so grotesquely alien to herself; but the moment she now appeared the effect of these surroundings was reversed. Her dress, her expression, and her movements, seemed by contrast with the room to possess an added refinement which gave her the aspect of an apparition; and her nearness to what was vulgar and tasteless showed him how completely she was detached from it. Her eyes were soft with welcome; her lips eager and parted. But as he approached her he experienced a sudden check. She gave him her hand with a coldness which effectually kept him at a distance. With a quick peremptory frown, "Don't come near me," she said. "You must sit there quite away from me," and then added, half laughing, "There—in that leather chair."

In act he was completely obedient, but his mind was up in arms and rebellious ; and though he still smiled as he spoke, and responded sufficiently to what she said to him, he felt his manner assuming a certain chill formality, which meant, " If you are distant, I can be distant too." As for her, had his judgment been only calm enough, he would have recognized in the tones of her voice, and in the way her eyes followed him, much if not everything that he had hungered for and missed in her greeting. He would have recognized it also in something else, which did as a fact merely annoy him farther ; namely, the sort of subjects to which she managed to confine the conversation. But this perhaps would have required an amount of philosophy beyond the command of any but a lukewarm lover. For not only did she make no allusion whatever to their past, but whenever he tried to do so, she rendered his efforts futile, and kept moving from one indifferent topic to another, like a bird moving among branches that just are out of reach.

Unintentionally he helped her in doing so. Hoping in time to change her mood by humouring it, he spoke to her about the Greek vases; and he really enjoyed sharing with her a momentary laugh about the matter. But she saw in it an avenue of escape, through which she could lead the conversation to other matters similar, and keep it far away from everything to which he wished to bring it.

"I don't know," she said, "what you will think of Mrs. Budden."

"And who," he asked, "may Mrs. Budden be?"

"Oh," she replied, "my mother-in-law! She married again after Paul's father died. She, you know, was English—as English as any one could be. She was born at Clapham, and belonged to some religious sect there; and this room represents her idea of the beauty of respectable holiness. Everything is an expensive protest against beauty of any other kind. She and Paul's father quarrelled like cat and dog; but, as soon as he died, she began to speak of him as a saint, and she kept

those vases there as 'a souvenir of my dear first husband'; though I fancy she enjoys their petticoats partly as a slap at his memory. He brought them from Athens, and they really are very fine."

Grenville caught at these last words, thinking they gave him an opportunity. He raised one of the muslin veils, and examined the vase it covered. "This," he began, "might have inspired Keats with his lines 'On a Grecian Urn.'"

Only a week ago, at such a remark as this, his hearer's eyes would have dwelt on his, full of the thoughts suggested by it. Now she seemed not to notice it, but went on in her former tone.

"Mr. Budden," she said, "who died of a sore throat, which he caught at a meeting for the suppression of dancing on the stage—Won't you listen to me? Why do you frown like that? Don't be cross: let me go on telling you. Mr. Budden was anxious that the vases should be broken to pieces; but my mother-in-law, who resents all suggestions on

principle, has often told me how indignant she was at this one; and then when Mr. Budden timidly ventured on another, which was that they should be sent as a present to the British Museum, 'Mr. Budden,' she said, 'I know my own business best. Were they sent to the Museum, their indecorum would be exposed to the public. Here, modestly covered, they at all events can do no mischief; and I can avoid affronting my dear first husband's memory without feeling that I have any sin on my conscience.' "

In the way all this was said there was no trace of unkindness. There seemed to be in her nature a gentleness which left her blows their precision, but checked their force just as they were in the act of striking.

Under other circumstances her anecdotes might have amused and pleased him; but now they jarred on his nerves as flippant, and as a sign of heartlessness. Here he was, half separated from her, seeing her only in this breathless interval, longing to breathe to her some words of devotion, and to receive from

her the comfort of some answer; and her deliberately wasting this short golden opportunity in idle gossip about Greek vases and a mother-in-law, filled him with a bitter and growing sense that he was being trifled with. He made one or two further attempts to force her to speak more seriously; but he made the attempts in vain. She reverted each time to topics more or less trivial; and at last, stung by her treatment, and hardly reflecting on what he did, he rose abruptly and said to her, "I have bored you enough. I must be going."

"Must you?" she said, startled, and looking as if she understood nothing of his mood. "What time is it? It is late. Perhaps you had better go, then."

He had not expected to be taken at his word like this. He stared at her incredulously for a second or two, and then, in a voice which she hardly recognized as his own, "When shall I see you again?" he said. "I will never come again, if you don't wish me to. I will never trouble you more."

"Bobby!" she exclaimed, "what can you

be talking of? How silly you are! You had, indeed, better go now, unless you wish to see Mrs. Budden." For the first time, as she looked at him, it struck her that there was pain in his expression. She came close to him, and taking him by both hands, with distress in her own eyes, she said to him, "What is it, dear?"

"I feel," he said, "that you have hardly let me speak to you, and now you turn me away as if I were some chance visitor, and you will not even trouble yourself to tell me when, if ever, I am to see you again."

"Don't," she said, "don't remain any longer so near me. I feel as if all these rosewood chairs had eyes. You can see me to-morrow, I think. I have to go to my lawyer's, and you might take me afterwards to some place where we can have luncheon. I will let you know to-night. Please don't be angry with me, but go."

Half soothed by her parting words and manner, and yet still embittered by the unnatural constraint of the interview, he went

out into the maze of suburban roads, and heavy with a sense of desolation began to walk towards London. But a week ago—only a week ago—they were in that enchanted world of forest and lake and solitude, and now, he reflected, how great and how desolating was the difference !

The following day the promised letter arrived, and, having repaired at the hour named in it to the street where her lawyer lived, he waited for half an hour, and she at last came out to him. There was a well-known hotel in the neighbourhood, and they lunched together in the coffee-room. Confidential conversation was, under the circumstances, impossible ; but there was something in her manner which spoke to him of her affection as plainly as words could have done, and perhaps more plainly than was prudent. But after luncheon she was obliged to meet her mother-in-law, and they parted without the solace of one single natural moment.

For the next few days they met in the same way. Sometimes she was tender with him, as

she had been on this occasion ; and not she, but circumstances, were the only objects of his resentment. But just as often she was ill-tempered and absent ; her business seemed so to preoccupy her as almost to put him out of her thoughts ; and once, when he slightly reproved her for not noticing some personal question, she turned on him, saying, " What is it you ask me ? Do you think I came here for the purpose of talking to *you* ? You forget that to me this law business is really serious."

On that very occasion he had, in order to meet her, given up an important business engagement of his own, and also a luncheon at which he was to have met the Prime Minister. The next day, what happened was even worse. His conduct with regard to the luncheon had produced considerable awkwardness, and with regard to his business engagement, extreme trouble and inconvenience ; and when he met Mrs. Schilizzi, there was a trace of pre-occupation in his manner. This seemed to annoy her. She taxed him with being out of temper, and said, " If you don't want to see

me, you'd better have stopped away." He explained to her as well as he could what it was that was on his mind. "You know," he added, "the state my affairs are in. I am selling all I have, and must make the best bargain I can. By not keeping my engagement——"

"Well," she said, "what of that?"

He hesitated. "Merely," he said at last, "I shall lose, I think, several hundred pounds. To a poor man like me, this is a real loss. Please forgive me for thinking about it."

She asked him for no particulars; she never said she was sorry for him. She said only, "Can't you forget it, as long as you're with me?"

He tried to do what she asked him, and this interview ended happily; but the memory of it, that night, came back to him clearer than the experience. The wounds she had inflicted on him, hardly noticed by him at the time, began to ache and bleed; and his diary was the reflection of a heart knowing its own bitterness.

"We have," he wrote, "two consciences—a moral and an intellectual one; and I suppose that most men who have not silenced both, are not only accustomed at times to examine their own condition, but to see it in two different lights. Now my moral conscience, in a way which I never should have thought possible, has justified my choice in life; and so till lately did my intellectual conscience also. But my intellectual conscience now is asking me if I am not a fool.

"Irma, what have you done to me, that I should ask myself this question? Here am I deliberately—not in an impulsive moment, but deliberately—preparing, with a careful and painful choice of means, to make myself naked of everything which ordinary wisdom would tell me was best worth my living for. I am throwing into the fire everything for which ambition craves, just as it was being put into my hands. The home of my family, which I might have restored, I am going to sell; and all chances of a home in another sense I am putting voluntarily away from me.

And for what? This very morning, before I met her, I was with my man of business, going over the details of the proposed sale of my property, and learning, amongst other things, how by meeting her yesterday I had lost my chance of arranging with a very difficult creditor; and then, when I tell her this—I was obliged to tell her; I should never otherwise have breathed to her a word about it—good God! how does she behave to me? I should have felt less pain if she had stuck a dagger into me. And yet what I wince at is not so much my own pain, as the thought that her nature should make it possible for her to inflict it. She sees that for her sake I am giving up everything; and she might, one would have thought, have guessed without being told that it costs me something at all events to part with my old home. She might even have sympathized with my troubles about money when they were accidentally brought to her notice. But no—I got from her not one word of sympathy. Whatever I may suffer seems to be absolutely nothing to her, except in so far

as I annoy her by letting her see my suffering. How can a woman be like that ? I don't know. It's all a puzzle to me. Irma, Irma—are you going to make me hate you ? If you could I should be free, and there would be an end of the matter. But I can't hate you—that's the difficulty. Perversely and irrationally my faith in you still sticks to me, though it gives me no comfort ; and my love for you puts in your hand the weapons with which you wound me. If I didn't love you, you might be as hard and shallow as you pleased. And yet at times I can plead for you, and make out a case for you, explaining away all your strange behaviour, and showing you to be still unchanged. But then—then—here is the distracting thing :—the moment I have done that, I refute all my own pleadings and represent you to myself as—I can't write down what. Irma, I won't even think of it. I will believe, though I can hardly realize, that you are still the Irma of that far-off lake and forest, who was not ashamed to tell me all her thoughts, or to show me her eyes with tears in them.

Yes—I will believe that, even if I cannot feel it.

“But quite apart from all doubts of this kind, how wretched my position seems! As I say, I have given up everything for the companionship of this woman; and with what result? Three-quarters of an hour out of the twenty-four is the most I see of her; and these few minutes are snatched with difficulty, followed by hours of pain, and preceded by hours of anxiety, as if all the time between them were stretched and tortured on a rack. And yet—and yet—if you are not the most contemptible of women, Irma, Irma, I should like to be saying this to you—if you are worth anything to me you are worth everything.”

After he had written this, he read it over again. He paused at one sentence, repeating it half aloud to himself. “Yes,” he said, “it is just that. All my time is being stretched and tortured on a rack. I am wretched until I have seen her. I am still more wretched afterwards.”

Several days went by, and matters did not

mend. Indeed, the strain on his nerves became even more intolerable. Each time he met her she would, once or twice at least, look at him with her old expression, and speak to him with her old tenderness; but always in the background there seemed to be some ambushed anger, which would spring out at him suddenly, he knew not for what reason; and, worse still than this, when her anger was hushed or absent, and when her eyes were kind, she had an air of preoccupation which he had never noticed in her before; and when her words replied to him, her thoughts seemed to be wandering. At each successive meeting, from its beginning to its close, he was hoping every moment that she would break through this strange disguise, and show him her true self again—the self he had once known. But he hoped in vain; and even when she said Good-bye, something rigid remained in the lines of her softening lips.

Painful and perplexing as these interviews were in themselves, their pain was doubled in the memories which they left behind them,

and which permeated the hours he was away from her like the virus from some snake's bite. And these hours now formed the great bulk of his life. Some of them were occupied by his own business matters; some by work in Downing Street; and for each night he had some dinner or party. But these occupations and engagements left him long intervals of solitude, and he had not the heart himself to seek out any society. Indeed, even had he wished to do so, he would generally have been unable; for she left him in such uncertainty as to where and when she would see him, that he rarely could make an engagement four hours in advance. He was always returning to his rooms to see if there were any letter from her; and then, when there was one, which settled their next interview, he vainly tried during the interval to calm himself by walking, wandering away into the suburbs, or into obscure streets; whilst life was for him like a tree of iron in hell, and his thoughts were like birds who found every twig burn them.

"I used," he wrote in his diary on one of those unhappy days, "I used to think, before all this happened, that I had plenty of self-control; but I don't know now what's come to me. Certain words from her, even little looks and gestures, wound me, and make me beside myself. My wretchedness now is like the acute wretchedness of a child. All these parties I go to seem like parties of the damned, or some mad show got up to mock me. Through conversation, through music, through everything, I feel the desolation to which she has reduced my life; and then—I can't help it—I get embittered against her. Sometimes when that happens I am aghast at my own temper, and I wonder if any one ever had such a devilish heart as mine. All I plead is that when this temper possesses me, I never quite yield to it. I said I was wretched as a child is wretched; but the difference is, I don't show my wretchedness. Often, when I have felt most violent and vindictive, I have, in order to cure myself, done little acts of kindness which I might

not have thought of otherwise. Once when I caught myself—can I write it?—when I caught myself cursing Irma, I helped an old woman—it was on a road near Wimbledon—to lift into a cart some baskets of clothes that had fallen from it. She said, ‘God bless you, sir!’ I was glad to hear her say that. And then in the street sometimes, when, absorbed in my angry mood, I have refused a penny to a beggar, I have walked back and caught him up, and given him something. The day after Irma had made me most angry, I spent the morning with my old aunt, trying to make things smooth for her; and I paid some money into her account at her banker’s. Oh, Irma, why do you make me so angry—so unworthy of my own self-respect?

“But anyhow, though I see now my own inward weakness, for practical purposes I have been able to conquer it. In spite of the pain which has had its teeth in my heart, I have pleased the Chancellor of the Exchequer with some work I have been able to do for him.

He praised me for my clearness and my energy. I have seen the Prime Minister, and he too was complimentary. This is good for me; because, when I next see Irma, and she treats me like so much dirt, or seems to do so, I am able to bear it better; for I think I must be still worth something."

Next day, however, his philosophy quite broke down. She asked him to meet her at a shop, and help her to choose a carpet, which was, she said, wanted for her own home at Hampstead. He went. He waited for half an hour in the street, till a group of boys and a policeman all began to stare at him; and then, when she came, her only greeting was this, "Come in quickly. Don't you know I've no time to spare?" In the shop when she asked his advice, and he did his best to give it, every opinion of his and every suggestion she received as if it were some affront to her; and when once again they were in the street, she stood scanning the passing vehicles, and said to him sharply, "Well—are you not going to call a hansom?" "Do you

want one?" he asked. "What do you suppose?" she answered. "Do you suppose that I'm going to walk all the way from here to Hampstead?" He called a hansom instantly. In another second it was by the pavement. The promptitude of his action seemed a little to discompose her; but he gave her no excuse for lingering. He politely helped her to enter. He closed the door; gave the man the directions; raised his hat to her, turned on his heel, and went. That evening his diary was very brief. It was simply, "This can't go on. Unless she changes, I must leave her. There's nothing else to be done. Irma, I must say good-bye to you."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE following morning he could hardly believe his eyes. Having lain awake half that night, he had finally overslept himself; and the moment he woke, a letter was put into his hands. It was from her. "Tomorrow," she wrote, "my mother-in-law will be away for the entire afternoon. Call for me here at two, and we will go to my own house. I have several things to attend to, and I want you to see the place. Was I cross yesterday? You were."

This invitation, though its closing words annoyed him, came to Grenville like summer returned in winter. The pain at his heart ceased, like noise giving place to silence. It is true that when she met him in Mrs. Budden's

drawing-room, she still treated him with a certain superficial coldness; but it was a coldness which her eyes belied. She had on her hat and gloves, prepared to go out at once; and her cheeks were bright by contrast with the same brown dress which she wore on the day of the first expedition she had made with him. All the air of Lichtenbourg seemed clinging to its folds like a perfume.

"We will walk," she said. "It is the other side of the Heath. Come: I am quite ready. Let us be out of this dreadful room. As I told you the other day, my mother-in-law and all Paul's family seem to be staring at me out of these rosewood chairs." They were soon outside. "Do be careful," she said. "Walk not too near me. We can't tell who may be looking."

Before long, however, they were out of the region of streets, and had taken a path over the broken and furze-grown heath; and now, as she felt they were more securely alone together, her own natural manner, which Grenville had almost forgotten, came back to her.

"Irma," he said, "do you know how I feel now? I feel as if you had been dead, and had suddenly come to life again."

"Indeed," she replied, "I have been living under conditions that well might kill me." Her look and manner both showed that she understood him; but they left him sore with a sense that her sympathy was inadequate to his pain. "There," she said presently, "there is our house beyond those pine-trees."

It was a large house in a garden full of foliage, with a gleaming conservatory on one side, and stables and out-buildings on the other. The drive and the flower-beds were kept with exquisite neatness; the steps that led to the entrance were as white as a clean table-cloth. Everything suggested the aggressive neatness of a man who can think himself a gentleman only when his clothes are new. Indoors Grenville received the same impression. The floors were scrupulously polished; the walls smelt of paint and gilding; but at the same time he was astonished by the quality of the objects that surrounded him.

There was in the hall a magnificent Italian coffer, and a huge picture, which purported to be a Rubens, and which, if not an original, was at all events a splendid copy. There were fine Florentine chairs, and a large Venetian mirror; and glass doors on one side opened into the conservatory, which was glowing with tropical vegetation. The reception rooms were just what the hall might have led one to expect. The ceilings were gaudy with Parisian clouds and cupids; there was abundance of modern furniture, which had been bought at an exhibition; some Sèvres and Chelsea china; some marketable modern pictures; and placed about under glass cases, some cameos, some crystal goblets, and other objects similar. Though none of these individually was first-rate, nothing was bad; but the effect of the whole was frightful. It represented a life altogether at variance with whatever beauty the individual things possessed. They all took a tone from the large shining tables, on which photographic albums were arranged in pyramids, and from

the carpet, rich in pile, but monstrous in design and colour, whose crude vulgarity made a staring ground for everything.

Grenville tried to keep his impression of the room to himself, and merely said, "What a fine collection you have here!"

"Paul," she replied, "says that there isn't a saucer that wouldn't fetch now at Christie's more than the price he paid for it. Come—I will show you *his* room."

This was full of floridly carved walnut furniture, much resembling that of the apartment at Vienna; and the whole was somewhat suggestive of the interior of a Pulman car. On the thick hearthrug was an electroplated spittoon. There were some shelves designed for books, but used for boxes of cigars; and art was represented by some coloured prints of race-horses.

"You won't," said Mrs. Schilizzi, "find the portrait of any actress here. Paul is afraid of his mother, whose eyes are as quick as arrows. She tolerates those horses only under severe protest; and she takes him to

church with her every Sunday twice. Oddly enough, in England he thinks she is quite right; and for this reason he prefers living abroad."

"What a home," thought Grenville, "for such a woman as this!" It bore the same relation to the homes with which he was familiar, that a school-boy's nonsense verses might bear to a passage from Virgil—composed of the same materials, but differing in having no meaning.

At last, however, a door was opened, passing through which he felt himself in another world. Here was a room, chill indeed with the tidiness that comes of being not occupied, but full of all the signs of delicate and refined life. The chairs were covered with old-fashioned flowered chintz; there were books in profusion, bound, not expensively, but with all the careful taste of one who evidently loved them. Over the chimney-piece were a few Chelsea figures; and on each side of the mirror were some cases of old miniatures.

"I have told the housekeeper," she said,

“to let us have tea here. We can be quiet here for a little ; and for a little while I can be myself again. How horrid and how strange you must have thought me these last days ! Bobby,” she went on, “this room means to me an entire lifetime. All these things were mine before I married ; and it was here that I first grew at home with pain. And yet, compared with the other rooms in this house, I look back on it as a refuge. I could be alone here—away from that dreadful drawing-room. Do you see this carpet, how old and shabby and worn it is ? I had it in my room at home. Paul was in such a rage with me because I wished to keep it. These old things of mine seemed often my only friends.”

He began to look at her books, at her pieces of china, and her miniatures. She went round the room with him, standing by him and explaining everything. He saw the volumes she had valued most when a child, with the blots and pictures she had made on margins and title-pages. She pointed out to

him her mother's miniature and her father's ; and all the affection and purity which had brooded over her childhood seemed to spread its wings over both of them and fold them in a common shelter.

"Irma," he said at last, "if only I could keep you always !"

She made no direct answer, but starting as if at a sudden thought, "Wait a minute," she said, and moved away towards a drawer. "Do you remember I told you at Vienna that I would show you something? Well, I couldn't find it, and you forgot to ask me about it. Here's what will do as well. See—this is Paul's photograph."

Grenville took it. He stared at it. The features were not new to him. They were those of the lover who had been his companion in the train. He examined it carefully to make himself quite sure ; and for reasons which at the moment he had not time to analyze, he felt as if some unknown weight had been lifted from his heart, or had been lightened. She had turned away

from him when he took it, so noticed nothing of his expression. His first impulse had been to tell her of his recognition, but he stopped himself; and he returned the picture to her, saying merely, "One day I must tell you something."

She looked at him shyly, without asking his meaning.

"It is late," she said. "It is time for me to be going. You must leave me here. You must on no account walk back with me."

"Tell me," he rejoined, "when shall I see you to-morrow?"

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "I wanted to talk to you about that. To-morrow I am quite free; Mrs. Budden is going into the country; but the day after I am going into the country myself. That day is Saturday, and I must stay away till Tuesday."

An exclamation of displeasure involuntarily escaped from Grenville.

"Don't be angry," she said; "why should you be so hasty? You can come with me if you like. That was what I was waiting to tell

you. I am going to a little sea-side place in Suffolk, to be for a day or two with a child of one of my sisters."

Grenville's expression underwent an immediate change. Happiness was filling his mind like water surging into a lock.

"Of course I will come," he said. "But about to-morrow—listen. I have seen *your* home to day. Will you come with me and see mine to-morrow? I am going to visit it, perhaps for the last time. It is," he went on, "only thirty miles from London." And he mentioned the railway by which to reach it, and also a convenient train. At first the expedition struck her as impossible. The fear of her mother-in-law seemed to paralyze her powers of movement; but the longing to come with him, growing as she thought over the project, presently showed her the means of absenting herself without offence.

At the appointed hour they met at Waterloo Bridge, and an hour's rapid travelling brought them to a Hampshire station, situated in a region of fir woods and wild commons. The

dusty road, along which they were soon driving, was bordered with trees which made a flickering shade. Yellow gorse glittered ; red-roofed cottages sunned themselves ; and the signs of old-world inns swung by the broad footpath. The whole landscape was full of that singular primitiveness to be found in so many places that are almost within sight of London ; and Mrs. Schilizzi was at once surprised and delighted at it. At length they reached a wide undulating heath, tufted with gorse and heather, and surrounded by zones of woodland, where white glimpses of several important houses showed in the distance, shimmering through the haze of trees. In the middle of this heath, at the beginning of an abrupt ascent, Grenville stopped the driver, and proposed to his companion that they should walk. He took her by a footpath up the slope through the gorse-bushes ; and the moment she reached the summit she stopped short with an exclamation. For there, on a slope beyond, backed by blue fir woods, and fronted by grass and fern, a forest of twisted chimney-stacks rose from a

dim red pile, whose magnitude was at once apparent from the number of its mullioned windows. Domed turrets in the garden, steps and balustrades, were visible. An avenue of elms climbed the slope to the house ; and hardly a furlong from where they stood were the lodge-gates giving access to it.

"And is that your home?" exclaimed Mrs. Schilizzi. "How beautiful!" The words were ordinary enough ; but there was a sort of sob in her utterance of them, full of thoughts and feelings which she was unable to speak. "And am I depriving you of this?" Such was its general meaning. Grenville knew that it was so, but affected to be otherwise occupied ; and when he spoke he forced his tone to be cheerful. "Do you see this?" he said, as he pulled a parcel from his pocket.

"Yes," she replied. "What is it?"

And as she looked and spoke, he saw that a tear fell from her cheek upon her glove. He showed her, with a laugh, a false beard and whiskers.

"I don't," he said, "want to be recognized

—in case there should be any one to recognize me. I want to go as a stranger, and I have an order to view, which will admit us. Look—are the things on properly? I wore them at some private theatricals; and my oldest friends said that they would never have recognized me. Tell me—do you think you would?”

She assured him his disguise was sufficient, and not altogether unbecoming; and they went together up the avenue. It was evident that the place received a certain amount of attention; but signs of neglect and dilapidation might be nevertheless traced everywhere. There was a sheet of water covered with green weed; there were fences ill-mended, and clumps of trees and shrubs killing each other for want of pruning. At last came the iron gates, just outside the house. Half their scroll-work was eaten away by rust. They passed through these into a great gravelled enclosure, and made their way towards the lofty windowed walls, which the down-drawn blinds covered with blots of whiteness.

"My tenants," said Grenville, "I know are away now. I shall pass for a stranger—for an intending purchaser. I couldn't have borne to be seen in my true character. Everything here has for me some memory—every door—every window—even that kennel there, where our old dog Ponto lived."

An echoing peal of the bell had meanwhile summoned a servant; and in the course of a few minutes they were making their tour of the house. On the principal floor, reached by a wide oak staircase, was a magnificent suite of rooms, hung with tapestry, and leading into a long gallery, full of old chests, and spinning-wheels, and the boots and breast-plates of cavaliers. The dark boards, with some scraps of faded matting on them, were here uneven with age, and the air was pungent with an incense-like smell of dust. To Mrs. Schilizzi the whole place was a revelation; and her breathless appreciation of it beguiled Grenville of his melancholy.

"We never," he said in French to her, "used this part of the house. We could

hardly afford even to have it swept. Our quarters," he continued, when they descended to the floor below, "our quarters were here, looking out on the garden." And the servant, as he spoke, admitted them to a good-sized drawing-room, hung with portraits, and surrounded with dim gilt tables. On one of these portraits Grenville fixed his eyes, and then said hastily to the servant, "Pray open the dining-room—and the library too, and the boudoir. I know the house—I shall have to see all of them."

The man went; and as soon as they were left alone, "Irma," said Grenville, "that picture is my mother. That is my little sister. They are both dead. Do you see this marble table, with a pack of cards inlaid in it? My mother was sitting by it, her head resting on her hand, the only time I ever said an unkind word to her. I was only fifteen then. I remember to this day the line of pain that quivered at the corners of her closed mouth. Everything speaks to me here. Don't think me a fool. I hope that man's

not coming. I shall be too blind to see him."

His face was averted. He looked as if he were staring at the wall ; but a moment later he turned to her, first biting his lip, then forcing a laugh ; and there was nothing left in his eyes betraying a want of fortitude. Afterwards they went into the garden, and then through portions of the park. He pointed out to her the bark of a youngish beech-tree, on which some letters were cut, distorted by the rind's growth. They were still legible ; and they spelt, " Robert Grenville."

"Come," at last he said to her, "come—we have seen all. When my mother and my sister died, I was fonder of this place than of anything."

"And now," she said, "for the sake of a worthless woman, you are going to rob yourself of all that was most dear to you."

"No," he replied ; "a woman has revealed to me something that is dearer."

At a convenient spot he freed himself of his slight disguise. They rejoined their carriage,

and the train was hurrying them soon to London.

Her manner now had a tenderness he had never known in it before. In the earlier days of their relationship her being had clung to his. It now seemed to him brooding compassionately over it. Poetry and prose come into strange contact. Signs and advertisements on each side of the line showed them they were nearing London, and roused her from a long silence.

"You," she said, "who are sacrificing so much for me—do you know what I should say to you if I had the courage? I should say to you, Do not complete the sacrifice. As it is, I can say only, Let me do my all to repay you for it. And that all is so little. I never knew till to-day how much you really cared for me. This has been a day of happiness; and also a day of trouble."

"Well," he answered, "trouble is to love what night is to a star."

"Vauxhall!" shouted a voice outside.
"Tickets ready—all tickets."

They both laughed at this interruption, and their parting at the terminus had peace in it—a peace which was disturbed only by throbbing anticipations of to-morrow. As for him, he all that night dreamed of the station at Liverpool Street, which was to be the scene of their next meeting; and each time he awoke, as he often did restless from expectancy, the darkness of the future was illuminated by an *Aurora Borealis* of hope. But doubts still annoyed him as to whether hope would fulfil itself, till he actually saw her dress glimmering amongst the crowd on the platform; and he found himself gliding away with her from under the station arches, leaving London behind them for the hush of the Suffolk shores.

But now he was secure of her. The melancholy of yesterday, the anxieties and jarring incidents of the days preceding, gave to them a feeling of exultation, as if they were escaping from some house of bondage; and as for the sacrifice which had so lately saddened both of them, he had forgotten he had to make, she, that she had to accept it.

The watering-place they were bound for was little more than a fishing-village, with some villas, an hotel, and a terrace of lodging-houses annexed to it; and though in its season Cockneys swarmed like flies there, now it was full of its own local silence. Two musty cabs, however, were waiting patiently at the station, whose drivers appeared even more surprised than pleased when two well-dressed strangers appeared and engaged both of them.

Mrs. Schilizzi was to stay in lodgings that had been engaged by her sister. Grenville had, by telegraph, ordered rooms in the hotel. The two abodes were not very far apart. They both looked on a wind-swept down or common, fringing which was the beach and the shining sea. On this common they had arranged to meet in an hour; and Grenville saw at a glance that there would be no chance of their missing each other. They met. After the jars and noises of London, and the painful and precarious interviews which, straining the nerves of each

and trying the tempers, still left smarting traces of the pain that had been thus inflicted, the intense peacefulness which now surrounded them lay on their ears like velvet, and found its way into their souls. The only sounds heard were intermittent and isolated—the occasional rattle of some solitary cart or van, or of one little yellow omnibus with the packages of some commercial traveller, the voices of a child or two playing, or of one man calling to another by name, or the plunge of the waves which, long and slow and shining, curved into foam and fell on the shingle not far away. She took his arm, confidently, with a frank temerity, and they went towards the beach, over the thin pale-coloured grass, crushing with their feet as they did so many a drifted shell. Scents of the sea moved and floated in the air, and their hearts were filled to overflowing with a deep tumultuous tranquillity. They sat on the shore; played with the pebbles and threw them; and watched the dove-coloured clouds change their shapes on the horizon, and catch the gleams of sunset.

"To-morrow," she said to him, "we will manage to dine together. This evening at six I must have tea with my little niece. You can dine meanwhile, and take me out again afterwards."

At a little distance was an old wooden pier, dilapidated, and looking like the ribs of some wrecked vessel. An hour or two later they walked to it, when it looked black in the moonlight, and they sat together almost silent on one of its crazy benches. The tide was full. There was a hush on the breathless waters; and in Grenville's heart was the hush and fulness of the tide. At last he felt her his own again, as she had been in the Hungarian forest. All his doubts and pains and desolating exasperation faded out of his memory, and became things unbelievable. They only had this effect, that she was dearer to him now than ever. For some time they spoke only in those broken syllables which if written down seem so silly or unmeaning, but which are for lovers signs of a silent eloquence, like ripples that

break at intervals on a current of noiseless waters. But at last Grenville roused himself, and with an effort changing his manner, began to address her with a distinct and deliberate utterance, which might to a passing listener have sounded entirely commonplace. At first she looked at him, puzzled; but she soon understood his meaning.

"I wish," he said, "but I don't wish it from vanity, that you would think over various merits which I venture to think myself possessed of. In many ways I'm an excellent man of business. I can grasp a legal point almost as quickly as a solicitor. I could at this moment go into many a city office, and amend the details of many a financial scheme. I have a keen sense of the ridiculous. I'm a seasoned man of the world; and no one has known better than I how to value the world's advantages. But you—I am not in the least exaggerating—have transmuted the world for me like an alchemist. You have turned my estimate of things entirely topsy-turvy. What I would tell you, if I could,

in the most passionate language of poetry, I can tell you also in the baldest and most matter-of-fact prose. My devotion to you is so real, and goes so through my whole life, that it would bear being expressed in an affidavit quite as well as in a poem. Nero wished that the populace had only one throat, that he might cut it. All the things I value have only one pair of eyes; and they are close to me—I see them shining now. Irma,” he continued, “my heart is like a cathedral, where a lamp is always burning in your honour, and where sometimes in your honour there is nothing but solemn silence, sometimes the murmur of some new act of devotion. Tell me, do my words reach you so as to make you feel them; or are they like a jet of water from a fire-engine too far off, which breaks into spray before it strikes what it is aimed at.”

“Don’t,” she exclaimed, “don’t. Your words not only strike, but penetrate; and my heart is so full of what they mean, and so jealous of losing it, that——what shall

I say? Dear, I can hardly bear it. I am rather sad to-night. I will tell you why to-morrow."

To-morrow came; but the promise was not at once fulfilled. In the morning she was sad no longer. She was buoyed up on the tide of a triumphant happiness against which she could not struggle; and the horizon of the day before her was like that of a summer sea, which met heaven and hid all the world beyond. Some hours she devoted to her little niece, doing for her all that could be done by the kindest mother; but every minute not thus occupied she spent with Grenville, full of a simple-hearted happiness which trouble dared not sully. But towards the evening her sadness returned again. They were sitting on the beach, watching some distant sails. Suddenly she said to him—"To-day you've been very good to me. You've not been angry with me because I've given so many hours to my niece; and yet I am sure it tried you. But you knew it was my duty; and you never once looked cross at

me. I am so touched, dear, by all these little forbearances. And yet—oh, Bobby, Bobby, there is something I want to say to you. I wanted to say it last night, only I hardly knew how; and all to-day I've not wanted to say it at all."

"What is it?" he asked. She hesitated and blushed. She began to speak, and then stopped herself. What was in her mind Grenville could not conjecture; but one thing came better to his view than ever it had done before—the fact that for him she was guilelessly and defencelessly truthful. There was something almost painful in the degree to which this touched him—in the new and sudden call which it made on his care and tenderness. "What is it?" he asked again. "Tell me. I shall understand, whatever it is."

"Yes," she said; "I indeed believe you will. You understand me too well; and it—you are too good to me. I think I can tell you now. You see, Bobby, my loving you—you see sometimes it is mere happiness, just as it's been to-day; and then at other

times it overwhelms me and lifts me like a religion. It was like that last night, and it's so again now. Well, this is what I feel—if we weren't in a public place, I should like as I told you to hide my eyes on your shoulder—I feel that the higher and purer my love gets, it raises some standard in me by which I condemn myself; or at any rate, it makes doubts trouble me which in more careless moods I can answer. Don't be angry with me. I blame myself, not you."

"I myself," he said, "am not free from trouble. When I put before myself our position in general terms, often and often I condemn it; but when I think of it as it really is, and when I think of you as a part of it, let me say what I may to myself, it is redeemed, and my blame falls powerless on it. But oh, Irma, I ought to tell you this: If you don't agree with me naturally I don't want—how difficult it is to put some things—I don't want to cajole you with what your conscience may resent as sophisms."

"Dear," she said, "I did not mean to dis-

tress you. I believe at heart I feel exactly as you do ; but my doubts will come at times, and I like to tell you everything. But this evening, Bobby, they have come, not, I think, on their own account, but merely because my spirits are getting a little low again. I have a sort of presentiment that something bad will happen to-morrow ; and even if it doesn't, to-morrow is our last day here. The day after I shall have finished my business ; and then I shall have to leave you and hurry back to my children. To leave you—that will be sad enough ; but not even for your sake would I stay away from my children. Perhaps if they were here I should have none of these morbid fancies.”

“Irma !” said Grenville, “what have you just been saying ? Do you suppose that when you go I shall not go also ? So long as your welfare will not suffer by it, and so long as you will allow me, I mean never to leave you ; whilst as to your children—I should hardly believe I had any place in your heart if that place in some ways were not subordinate to

theirs. And now," he went on, "there is something more—I have never yet mentioned it to you; indeed, I only knew it a day or two ago—which I want to tell you. It has made to me a considerable difference since I knew it."

"Yes?" she gasped. "Is it anything very dreadful?"

"You remember," he answered, "that at your house the other day you showed me a certain photograph. Well—I recognized it. I have already met the original. I travelled with him from Paris to Vienna before my visit to the Princess. I talked to him. Listen, I will explain to you all about it."

"Are you sure it was he?" she interposed. "Was he alone? I believe he very rarely is."

"He was alone in the train; but somebody was with him on the platform. He told me who she was. He was very frank and communicative. You, I dare say, will know what I mean by that. I don't want to dwell on it, but I want to tell you that since I made this discovery, the chief uneasiness that lurked in

my mind is gone. I only knew it was there by the relief it has given me by going. I am appropriating nothing that he either understands or values. I always felt that this was so; but only now has it been proved to me. Can't you see with me what a difference this must make?"

She looked him long in the face; and at last, turning away, "I am glad," she said, "of this. It makes me also happier. You now see what my position is, and how completely, except for you, I am alone. Please don't fret about me. My heart has been lightened as yours has been. I am happy. I am alone no longer."

Nor next day was the state of her mind changed. The thought that this peaceful interval would so soon come to an end did, indeed, sadden both of them; but it was a sadness brooding over peace, like clouds over a quiet sea. The midday post, however, brought her a letter from London, bearing many stamps on it, and darkened with re-directions. "It is something from Paul!"

she exclaimed. Her cheeks flushed as she read it. "His work at Smyrna is nearly done," she said presently, "and — what is this? There are some new waterworks at Bucharest, for which the firm has a contract. He will be going there in three weeks. He supposes that I and the children are at Vienna or with the Princess; and as soon as he is able to do so, he will come to us."

She dropped the letter on her lap, and looked at Grenville silently. "Of course," she said at last, "it must have happened sooner or later; but sometimes, Bobby, sometimes one forgets things."

"If you," he replied, "are as serious as I am, we both of us have to face a difficult and painful situation. I have known this all along; still, when such a thing comes close, of course at first one shudders at it. But even if our path grows stony, do not the less lean on me."

As he spoke her smile again came back to her, but she acknowledged his words solely by a single glance of gratitude. He felt that this

gave him a new insight into her character. He felt that many things in her behaviour, many little cases of what seemed neglect and carelessness, were due not to any want of recognition on her part, but to a foregone conclusion that he would take her recognition for granted. And so through all that day, though a certain sadness filled it, a happiness reigned which the sadness only deepened. They arranged to dine late, so as to catch the last glow of the evening; and again they sat on the shore together, playing with the pebbles and the sea-weed, and watching the waves fall. Everything on which their eyes rested was steeped in a pathetic beauty, which did not come from the sunset, though that indeed was beautiful, but which comes at any hour to things seen for the last time. She had been repeating some random fragments of poetry. Once or twice she had quoted a line wrong, and he had laughed at her. Certain sorts of ridicule are more tender than a caress. For one verse especially he insisted on finding fault with her. It was an English

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